



Image from: [Donald Trump in 1000 CEOs](#)

Summary Article: **Trump, Donald John**
from *The Columbia Encyclopedia*

1946–, 45th president of the United States (2017–), b. New York City. Prior to his election as president in 2016, he was a business executive rather than a political leader. After attending Fordham Univ. and the Wharton business school (B.Sc., 1968), he joined the family real estate business. A self-promoting and flamboyant dealmaker who became widely known as simply “the Donald,” he was able to secure loans with minimal collateral in the free-wheeling 1980s and created an empire in real estate, casinos, sports, and transportation. By 1990, however, the effects of recession had left him unable to meet loan payments. Although he shored up his businesses with additional loans and postponed interest payments, mounting debt brought Trump to business bankruptcy and the brink of personal bankruptcy. Banks and bondholders lost hundreds of millions of dollars but opted to restructure his debt to avoid risking losing even more in a court fight.

By 1994, Trump had eliminated a huge portion of his \$900 million personal debt and reduced substantially his nearly \$3.5 billion in business debt. Forced to relinquish the Trump Shuttle (bought in 1989), he retained Trump Tower in New York City and control of his three casinos in Atlantic City. In 1999, Trump toyed with running for president on the Reform party ticket. Beginning in 2004, Trump starred in his own reality television show. He also cofounded a for-profit educational company, best known as Trump University, that offered real-estate and other courses, mainly from 2005 to 2010; several lawsuits that accused the company of fraud were settled in 2016. Crippling debt payments forced his casinos into bankruptcy again in 2004, and Trump's stake in the company was greatly reduced when it emerged from bankruptcy in 2005 and he was no longer the business's CEO. In 2009 the casino company again declared bankruptcy, and Trump agreed to reduce his stake to 10%. The Atlantic City casinos subsequently closed or were sold, and Trump divested of his stake in them. Despite the problems with his casino investments, Trump has significant real estate and hotel holdings including golf courses, but many real estate projects bearing his name are only licensing deals. Among his other holdings are a television production company and several beauty pageants.

Trump was again a potential Republican presidential candidate in 2011, and notoriously and repeatedly questioned President Obama's citizenship, but he chose not to run. In 2015 he became a candidate for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination. He subsequently became the front-runner—and a controversial figure—during the primaries and secured the Republican nod, choosing Indiana's governor, Mike Pence, as his running mate. Trump was hurt in the divisive general election campaign by his tendency to verbally abuse critics (which had also alienated Republicans in the primaries) and by accusations of sexual misconduct, but the Republican ticket defeated Democrats Hillary Clinton and Tim Kaine (although it lost the popular vote by the largest percentage since 1876).

President Trump moved to limit the impact of Obama's 2010 health-care legislation, though he was unable to win passage of legislation to replace it; he later took other actions, including ending insurance company subsidies for health insurance plans, designed to undermine it. Revelations that Russia had meddled in the U.S. election, hoping to influence it in Trump's favor, became a recurring issue. Michael Flynn, the national security adviser, was forced to resign after less than a month in office when it was

learned that he had lied about post-election contacts with Russian officials, and after the president fired FBI director James Comey over the Russia investigation, a special counsel (former FBI director Robert Mueller) was named to lead it. Subsequently it was learned that Trump's son, son-in-law, and campaign manager had met (2016) with a lawyer who claimed to have information from the Russian government on Hillary Clinton. Flynn and other campaign personnel, as well as Russians and Russian companies, were indicted by Mueller beginning in late 2017, and the Justice Dept., FBI, and Mueller's investigation became the object of denunciations by Trump and some Republicans.

The administration also suffered several controversies of its own making, including a travel ban on several largely Muslim nations (later expanded to a few other nations) that faced court challenges because remarks by Trump and other administration figures concerning Muslims that raised religious bias issues; Trump's accusation, despite a lack of evidence, that Obama's administration had wiretapped him; and various comments, some public, some reported, that led many to regard the president as a racial bigot. The Trump administration's most significant legislative success in its first year was the passage of an income tax overhaul in Dec., 2017; a budget with significant spending increases was adopted in Mar., 2017.

Internationally, President Trump quickly withdrew the country from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a Pacific Rim trade pact. Continued missile and nuclear weapons testing by North Korea in 2017 led to tensions with the new administration that did not ease until 2018, and Syrian government poison gas attacks in 2017–18 provoked retaliatory U.S. missile strikes and created tensions between the United States and Russia. Trump also withdrew the United States from the 2015 Paris climate accord; decided to increase U.S. forces in Afghanistan and not set a timetable for withdrawal, and also to maintain a U.S. force in Syria after Islamic State was largely defeated there and in Iraq; and stopped certifying Iran's compliance with the multinational nuclear agreement and threatened to withdraw from it, prompting criticism from U.S. allies who were also party to the accord. In early 2018, tariffs were imposed or proposed by Trump administration on some imported products; many were aimed at China, which responded with tariffs on U.S. products, leading to concerns about a possible trade war.

See his autobiographies (1987, 1991, 1997; though their accuracy has been questioned); biography by T. L. O'Brien (2005); studies by W. Barrett (1991), G. Blair (2000), M. D'Antonio (2015), D. C. Johnston (2016), M. Kranish and M. Fisher (2016), M. Singer (2016), and J. Green (2017).

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