

The Bush presidency first appraisals

This analysis has at least two basic defects. First, it ignores the real promises Bush made during the 1988 campaign. For all the heavy-handed symbolism about the flag and Willie Horton, Bush said enough about improving education, protecting the environment, and fostering social betterment to persuade voters that he saw a bigger need for government to play a role in their lives than Reagan did. As a result, he obligated himself to propose more in the way of domestic programs than he has chosen to offer. Those unfilled promises helped him carry 40 states.

The second flaw in the "Bush is doing as well as could be expected" argument is that it overstates the political obstacles confronting him. Thus, Rockman writes, Bush's leadership style "tends to blend into a set of political circumstances that offer him slim pickings." Similarly, Sinclair, in analyzing Bush's frustrations with Capitol Hill, seeks to rebut Bush's critics by emphasizing what she calls "contextual factors," chiefly the Democratic majorities in the House and Senate. "The fault is not one of personal frailties, ineptitude, and disreputable motives, as the media often suggests," she argues, "but of structures, incentives, and conflicting policy goals."

