

What Trump's impeachment and acquittal means for the American Republic



On Sunday, February 14th former President Donald Trump was acquitted by the US Senate on the charge of “incitement of insurrection”, which had been brought by the US House following the January 6th Capitol insurrection. LSE US Centre Director [Professor Peter Trubowitz](#) writes that while the result shows the extent of the Republican Party's decline, some of its members in the House and Senate were still able to put country before party and vote for impeachment and conviction.

What does the result mean for Trump?

The Senate vote to acquit means that Trump remains a potent political force in American politics. For those who favored convicting the former President of “high crimes and misdemeanors,” the trial offered a pathway to not only standing up for the rule of law, but also making it impossible for Trump to run again for political office. Acquittal means that Trump can, in principle, run again for the presidency in 2024. Of course, he would be running as a twice-impeached president and between now and then, there are sure to be additional revelations about Trump's role in the January 6 insurrection, to say nothing of the possibility that he will end up in court, either facing criminal charges for his role in the insurrection or any of a number of investigations by federal and state prosecutors into his behavior before and during his presidency. Meanwhile, while a significant minority of Americans strongly support the former president, a large majority of Americans strongly disapprove of him. It's worth remembering that Joe Biden soundly defeated him last November, and that the Senators who voted to acquit him represent states containing only [38 percent](#) of the US population.

What does the result mean for America and the integrity of its politics?

There is good news and bad news here. The bad news is that in the face of incontrovertible evidence that former President Trump incited the January 6 insurrection, a majority of Republicans in the Senate did not see fit to convict him for these obvious high crimes against the United States. Even those like Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (KY), who voted for Trump's acquittal at the Senate trial, in a [speech](#) immediately after the Senate voted, castigated the former President, and conceded that the substance of the House impeachment's case against Trump was on the money. So, there is much to lament here about the state of American politics and especially, the decline of the Republican Party at the hands of Trump and those like McConnell who did so much to support the former President over the past four years.

So what's the good news?

The good news is that the Congress certified the November election despite Donald Trump's effort to prevent the peaceful transfer of power; that the House of Representatives, the people's house, did its job by bringing the Article of Impeachment against the former president forward to the Senate; and that seven Republicans in the Senate (and lest we forget, ten Republicans in the House), put country before party. These are not trivial things. While they do not guarantee that this kind of thing could never happen again in America, they remind us, as Benjamin Franklin suggested shortly after the Constitution was signed in Philadelphia, that responsible political leadership, active civic engagement, and a free press are essential if the country is to endure and thrive as a republic.

- This article is based on remarks Professor Trubowitz made in an interview with Radio News Hub.
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Peter Trubowitz is Professor of International Relations, and Director of the LSE's US Centre. His main research interests are in the fields of international security and comparative foreign policy, with special focus on American grand strategy and foreign policy. He also writes and comments frequently on US party politics and elections and how they shape and are shaped by America's changing place in the world.