



Peter Trubowitz

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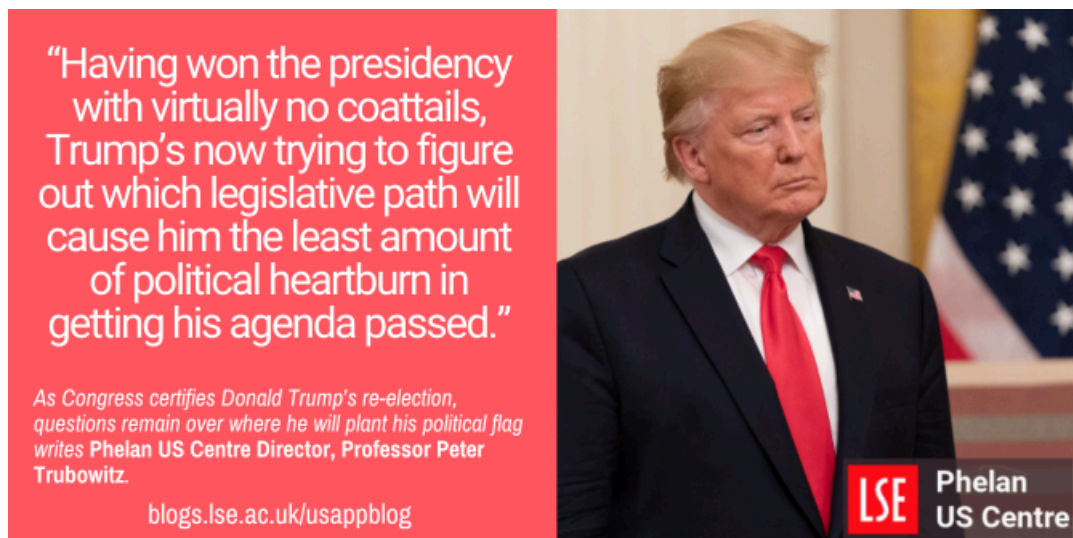
As Congress certifies Donald Trump's re-election, questions remain over where he will plant his political flag



*Today in Washington DC the US Congress will meet to certify the results of the 2024 election, and Donald Trump's presidential win. Four years ago, the same count was disrupted by Trump's supporters in a violent insurrection. Phelan US Centre Director, **Professor Peter Trubowitz** writes that, by contrast, there will be no election deniers or violence at the Capitol today. He also looks at Trump's influence on Congress and its legislative agenda, from aiding the re-election of the House Speaker, Mike Johnson, to pushing a single budget bill.*

Four years ago, on January 6, 2021, Trump's supporters invaded the US Capitol; will today be déjà vu all over again?

Not a chance. Four years ago, today was marked by unprecedented violence on Capitol Hill by those on the losing side. The violence had been incited by a sitting president, who American voters had soundly dispatched from office. The halls of Congress were filled with lawmakers and violent insurrectionists claiming the election was stolen. All those elements will be absent today. There will be no election deniers; there will be no violence; the sitting president is committed to the peaceful transfer of power, as have all before him save one. The incoming president, Donald Trump, has a chance to seize the moment to acknowledge his own role in the terrible events of that day. Unfortunately, what is more likely is that he will double down on the many falsehoods, denials, and misrepresentations that have left an indelible stain on the country.



“President Trump Meets with the Prime Minister of the Netherlands” (Public Domain) by The Trump White House Archived

Last Friday, the US House elected a new Speaker, but who really won the gavel?

Mike Johnson may hold the Speaker’s gavel, but Trump will be calling the shots. Johnson owes his speakership to Trump’s **last-minute intervention** to convince a couple of Johnson’s staunchest critics to switch their vote from nay to yea and pull the now-Speaker’s chestnuts out of the fire. In doing so, Trump strengthened his hold over Johnson, who still seems to be learning the ropes, despite holding the Speaker’s gavel since October 2023. What’s not clear is how strong a hold Trump has on the dozen or so Freedom Caucus lawmakers who are unhappy with deficit spending and working with Democrats. Given the Republicans’ historically **tiny House majority** of five seats in the new Congress, they will likely be a constant thorn in Trump’s backside.

Will we see two Trump bills, or one big one?

Last week, political prognosticators were betting that Trump would divide his legislative agenda (tax cuts and “fixing the border”) into **two bills**. Now everyone, including Trump apparently, is talking about merging everything into one **“big, beautiful bill.”** Why the change of heart? As the vote last week for Speaker, and the **near Republican failure** to keep the federal government open just before the holidays, both indicate, Donald Trump’s victory in November was hardly the mandate-awarding landslide he’s been claiming. Having won the presidency with **virtually no coattails**, Trump’s now trying to figure out which legislative path will cause him the least amount of political heartburn in getting his agenda passed. One big bill could give him more negotiating room to deal with ornery Republican budget hawks on Capitol Hill. But it would also likely mean months of delay with no guarantee of success. After all, a bill that meets the demands of the dozen or so budget hawks may not pass muster with more moderate Republicans in the House, or the Senate.

Where will Trump plant his political flag after January 20th?

If the politics swirling around Trump's political universe the past month are any indication, how Trump 2.0 plays out will depend greatly on where the re-elected president decides to plant his political flag: with the wealthy tech figures like Elon Musk and David Sacks, Trump's pick for AI and Crypto Czar, or the hardscrabble MAGA "true believers" like former Trump White House Chief Strategist, Steve Bannon, and Steven Miller, Trump's Deputy Chief of Staff, who can cause a lot of trouble for Trump, both inside and outside the Washington beltway. Last week's **political dustup** over the H1-B visa is a harbinger of fights to come over who should be allowed into the US, who should benefit from cutting taxes even more, and just how hard to hit China on trade and technology.

- *This article is based on interviews with Professor Trubowitz with **CNBC Squawkbox Europe** on 3 January 2025 and with **Bloomberg** on 6 January 2025.*
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Peter Trubowitz is Professor of International Relations, and Director of the LSE's Phelan 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.

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