

The trial is over. Trump won. Now get ready for the political fallout.

usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2020/02/05/trump-impeachment-fallout-linger-even-after-trial-has-ended/2857347001/



WASHINGTON – The impeachment trial may be over, but the fallout is not.

President Donald Trump's acquittal Wednesday on two impeachment articles formally ends a four-month saga that threatened to end his presidency and stoked partisan divisions in Congress and across the country.

The Senate voted 52-48 to acquit Trump on the charge of abusing his power and 53-47 on the obstruction of Congress count, handing him a victory that will enable him to finish his first term and energize his reelection campaign as he asks voters to give him another four years.

But the impeachment drama could have a lasting impact on Trump and other players:

Donald Trump

Trump can, and in all probability will, celebrate his acquittal on the campaign trail.

He has bellowed for months that Democrats used impeachment to try to overturn the 2016 election because they can't beat him at the polls.

"They can't win an election, so they're trying to steal an election," Trump said during a campaign rally last month in New Jersey.

Expect to hear more of that argument as he makes what is essentially an impeachment victory lap at campaign appearances across the country.

Even post-acquittal, Trump will carry the stain of impeachment. He is one of only three presidents in U.S. history to be impeached and the only president to seek reelection after being impeached. Democrats will try to turn his impeachment into an issue in November's election.

But conservative political commentator Scott Jennings predicts that it's Democrats who will be hurt at the polls by the impeachment drama.

"This is where Democrats did not want to be – another moment where they promised to take down the president and another failure," said Jennings, who worked in the White House under President George W. Bush. "I think it has already energized the president's base."

There already are signs that impeachment benefited Trump politically.

Trump's approval rating jumped by 6 points since last October and matched the highest of his presidency in a Washington Post-ABC News poll released last week. The poll found that 44% of Americans approve of Trump's overall job performance and 51% disapprove. Those still aren't great numbers – most Americans hold a negative view of Trump – but they are a significant improvement over his 38% approval mark in late October.

Impeachment also appears to have energized GOP voters.

Sixty-six percent of Democrats reported anxiety about the upcoming election compared with 46% of Republicans in a poll last week by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. GOP voters were more likely than Democrats to declare excitement about the race, and the share of enthusiastic Republicans appears to be rising, pollsters said.

Voter enthusiasm could shift again in the coming months, so it's hard to predict how much impeachment will be a factor when voters head to the polls in November, Republican consultant Matt Mackowiak said.

"By the time the 2020 election comes around, impeachment will have been nine months in the past," Mackowiak said. "I doubt impeachment will make much difference at all in the 2020 election. If it does, it will matter only in that it unified Republicans behind Trump even more strongly."

Kent Syler, a political scientist at Middle Tennessee State University and former Democratic congressional aide, said, "Impeachment will further energize both party bases, if that's even possible, but will not change the current political narrative for most voters. Republicans will see Democrats as 'Trump-hating' overreachers who will do anything to overturn the election. Democrats will see Republicans as Trump enablers who are continuing to tolerate and cover up his bad behavior."

Say what? Here are questions senators asked during Trump's impeachment trial

Joe Biden

Trump isn't the only presidential candidate who could feel the weight of impeachment even after it's over.

Former Vice President Biden, a Democratic presidential candidate, had a supporting role in the impeachment drama, which was triggered by Trump's campaign to pressure Ukraine to investigate Biden and his son Hunter, who served on the board of a Ukrainian energy company.

Though no evidence was uncovered that Biden did anything wrong, "he was contaminated by the Trump impeachment," said Ross Baker, professor of political science at Rutgers University-New Brunswick.

Nationally, Biden maintained his status as the overall Democratic front-runner during the impeachment trial. But in the early voting states of Iowa and New Hampshire, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders jumped ahead of him, according to some polls.

"Polarized voters are willing to overlook a lot, but it's safe to say that the Ukraine issue has not helped Joe Biden," Syler said. "His greatest appeal to Democratic primary voters is his perceived strength against Donald Trump. Any issue that impacts that perception could cost him votes and send Democrats looking for alternative candidates like Mike Bloomberg."

The Biden campaign said the impeachment trial did not harm the former vice president.

Other senators seeking the Democratic presidential nomination – in particular Sanders, Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota and Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts – were not hurt by the impeachment trial because of their ground game in Iowa. Sen. Michael Bennet of Colorado put most of his focus on New Hampshire.

Democratic candidates will try to use impeachment to their advantage, Baker said: "They're all coming back with a lot of ammunition."

Look for Democrats to ridicule [Alan Dershowitz](#), a member of Trump's impeachment trial defense team, who argued that presidents cannot be removed from office for an action they believe could help get them reelected.

Days before the Iowa caucuses, Biden alluded to Dershowitz's comments at a rally in Waukee, Iowa. In what sounded more like a general election speech rather than a primary speech, Biden slammed Trump's policies and his character.

"Political self-interest will not be confused with the national interest," Biden said. "And no one – not even the president of the United States – will be above the law."

Parsing impeachment: [Impeachment trial questions answered: Is President Trump 'impeached for life?'](#)

Senate races

Impeachment will almost certainly intensify the battle for control of the Senate, where Republicans hold a slim 51-47 majority. Democrats need to pick up just four seats to take control, and two dozen of the 35 Senate seats on the ballot this year are held by Republicans.

Vulnerable Republican senators, such as Susan Collins of Maine, Cory Gardner of Colorado and Martha McSally of Arizona, will have to explain their votes to constituents.

Collins in particular has been under scrutiny during Trump's impeachment trial. One of a handful of moderates in the Senate, Collins angered Democrats and independents when she voted in 2018 to confirm Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh despite allegations by three women that he sexually assaulted them.

Her vote to acquit to acquit Trump will probably shadow her through the remainder of her reelection campaign and once again put her on the defensive.

"Impeachment is this election's Brett Kavanaugh hearings," Syler said. "Voters are reminded why partisanship matters, and the eroding political center gets even smaller. If you are a moderate Democrat running in a red district or state, or a moderate Republican running in a blue district or state, your job just got tougher."

On the Democratic side, the most vulnerable senator up for reelection this year is Doug Jones of Alabama. Jones won the seat in a special election in 2017 triggered by the departure of Republican Jeff Sessions, who resigned when he was appointed attorney general by Trump.

Alabama is tough political terrain for any Democrat, and Republicans are eager to win back the seat this year. GOP candidates include Sessions, who was forced out of the attorney general's job by Trump but remains popular in Alabama.

Jones had just a slim chance of winning reelection even before the impeachment vote, Jennings said. His vote to convict Trump on both impeachment articles sends that chance "to zero-point-zero percent," Jennings said.

Impeachment concerns: GOP senator 'disturbed' by McConnell's 'total coordination' with the White House for impeachment trial

House races

House Democrats haven't heard the last of impeachment either.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., resisted efforts by some in her party to impeach Trump but finally allowed an impeachment inquiry following reports that Trump had held up millions of dollars in security aid in order to pressure Ukraine to investigate the Bidens.

To Republicans, hers is the face of the Democratic-led impeachment – and one that will appear in campaign ads in congressional districts across the country as the GOP tries to win back the House majority in November.

"House Democrats risk a voter backlash due to the perception that they invested their entire majority on impeachment, getting almost nothing else done," Mackowiak said.

Pelosi and other impeachment leaders such as Rep. Adam Schiff, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, represent solid Democratic districts and are not in danger of losing their seats in this fall's elections.

Other Democrats could have a tougher road to November.

Thirty-one Democrats represent districts that Trump won in 2016. All but three voted in favor of both articles of impeachment against Trump – a decision that could complicate their path to reelection.

Reps. Abby Finkenauer of Iowa, Xochitl Torres Small of New Mexico, Sean Patrick Maloney of New York, Conor Lamb of Pennsylvania, Ron Kind of Wisconsin and Abigail Spanberger of Virginia are just a handful of the Democrats whose votes to impeach Trump could become an issue in this fall's elections.

Rep. Jeff Van Drew, whose southern New Jersey district Trump won by 5 points, voted against both articles of impeachment. Then he ditched the Democratic Party and became a Republican.

Trump returned the favor by making a campaign appearance in Van Drew's district and showering him with adjectives like "courageous" and "principled."

"He shares our values," Trump said.

He'll no doubt find other choice words to describe the Democrats who voted to impeach him.