

Why I oppose President Trump's Impeachment or Removal from Office

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Of the 45 American Presidents, *nine* have failed to serve out a term for which they were elected. That's one in five.

Four Presidents were assassinated while in office:

Abraham Lincoln (1865)
James Garfield (1881)
William McKinley (1901)
John F. Kennedy (1962)

Four more died of what were termed natural causes during their term:

William Henry Harrison (1841)
Zachary Taylor (1850)
Warren G. Harding (1923)
Franklin D. Roosevelt (1945)

One other President left office prematurely:

Richard Nixon (1974)

Nixon resigned voluntarily after his imminent impeachment by the House of Representatives and conviction by the Senate became inevitable.

Two additional Presidents have been impeached by the House but remained in office because the subsequent Senate trial acquitted them:

Andrew Johnson (1868)
Bill Clinton (1998)

So far, no President has ever been removed from office after impeachment and conviction. Since the day of his election in 2016, President Trump has faced considerable political and public pressure for his impeachment. The reasons put forward by Trump's opponents range from his general unfitness for office, through "collusion" with Russians during the 2016 campaign or obstruction of justice, to egregious violations of the emoluments prohibition in the Constitution. If, in the 2018 midterm elections, the Democrats manage to regain a majority in

the House of Representatives — no matter how slim — impeachment proceedings will no doubt begin.

Anyone who reads my commentaries knows that I am not a supporter of Donald Trump. I regard him as a despicable human being and, as President, a toxic danger to our country. He's an unabashed authoritarian who would tear up the Constitution in a second if he could. I worry that America may not recover from the depredations, corruption, and criminality of his administration.

That said, I do not support Trump's removal from office by the means provided in the Constitution, namely, by impeachment and conviction. Why? Do I believe that impeaching Donald Trump would be an injustice? No. If any American President ever deserved impeachment, it's Donald Trump. Oh, I would dearly love to see that lying, narcissistic con man brought to justice and sent to prison. I'm fairly sure that about a third of Americans feels the same way.

Two factors, both of which are unpleasant, shape my opinion that removal of Trump from office would not help America, but would further harm us.

The first hard truth is that getting rid of Trump before his term is out doesn't rid us of his administration. Vice President Mike Pence would be sworn in as President if Trump were removed, and Pence — while different in style than Trump — is every bit as odious, and, in some ways, worse. As a fundamentalist religious zealot, Pence (even more than Trump) is the poster boy for reactionary culture.

That alone, however, is insufficient in my estimation to justify allowing Trump to remain in office. The heavier weight of the second factor is what tilts the balance for me.

Half of the American public believes that Trump is utterly unacceptable — a relentless bully and shameless liar who is a plague on the nation and a dangerous aberration not to be tolerated. Some people in the anti-Trump camp are disappointed that Hillary Clinton did not win the 2016 election. Others had serious doubts about Hillary or even rejected her as corrupt and untrustworthy, but they still hate Trump.

A smaller but still sizable percentage of the population, however — somewhere from 20-40% — is firmly in support of the President. That camp is far from monolithic, however, and is, in fact, quite diverse. Trump's enthusiastic followers are not all white, unemployed factory workers from the middle or lower classes. No, many Americans who are better off socioeconomically support Trump, for a host of reasons. They comprise a wide range of political and social beliefs, which include numerous coalitions, including: *free-marketeters*, who believe fervently in the sacred religion of unfettered capitalism; *American preservationists*, who are more liberal but love our country's mythic past; and *anti-elites*, who are contrarians unhappy with (and often enraged by) what they regard as the ruling

cabal of privilege. For a sizable percentage of Trump-supporters, values are at least as important as personal self-interest, and sometimes more important. That's critical, since people who hold values-based positions tend not to be swayed by inconvenient facts or pragmatic arguments.

This is Trump's base. For these Americans, Donald Trump is "their guy." The President plays to them with everything he says and tweets. In the media world of competing narratives, their news comes directly from Trump himself or his surrogates, but also from Fox News, right-wing Talk Radio, and the conspiracy-crazed Alt-Right online. Sometimes those are their only sources of news.

A fair number of Trump's base are true believers. Trump is their white knight and can do no wrong. Another percentage is less fervent. They acknowledge, at least in part, the failings in Trump's character, his authoritarian tendencies, and his narcissism. Nonetheless, they support his agenda — the charade of populism, the ridiculous promise to "make America great (i.e., white) again" by severely restricting immigration and turning back the tides of racial equality and religious tolerance, the false promises to "drain the swamp" and return us to the 1950s economic landscape. Also, Trump's base generally supports the conservative policies of an even bigger military (which includes updating our nuclear arsenal), gutting social services, and removing all government regulations that supposedly hamper economic growth by protecting the environment and/or public health.

I was 24 years old in 1974 when then-President Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon. The reasoning was that the country had suffered enough trauma over Watergate, and a Presidential pardon for the disgraced ex-President would allow the nation to heal, reunite, and move on, rather than be subjected to further division and conflict by the years of legal battles featuring Nixon as a defendant. I was outraged. I wanted Nixon to pay for what he had done — all of it. I didn't care about any future anguish or public division that Americans might have to endure were Nixon to be compelled to stand trial for his crimes.

And yet, I find myself now in a different position. Perhaps it's because I'm an old man and no longer an idealistic firebrand. I think, however, that our current situation is less like Watergate and more akin to the 1950s era of Joseph McCarthy and the Red Scare. Now, Americans are not afraid of communists, but of immigrants, minorities, and non-European foreigners. The Democrats are often criticized for succumbing to "identity politics," which is one reason given for their dismal failure to win elections. Trump's appeal, however, is its own brand of "identity politics," but for white people.

For the record, I agree with many of Trump's supporters that America is guilty of hypocrisy. I, too, am tired of those in power saying one thing and doing another, to the point of losing whatever faith I felt earlier in my life about the American experiment. Along with Trump's base and many other Americans, I regard the elites and most institutions as self-serving, and I no longer trust them.

The phenomenon of “fake news” re-enters here. Trump, of course, is a chronic and habitual liar, and the fever dreams of the Trumpian media are typically false, often outrageously so. Does that mean that the mainstream media is truthful? Sadly, no. I’m not implying that journalistic bulwarks such as The New York Times and CNN make up sources or create wholly fictional accounts, as Trump accuses almost daily. They don’t. Their reporting is careful and well-documented. But that doesn’t guarantee trustworthiness. Even accurate reporting can be used to support a questionable or invalid narrative.

A free press is essential to democracy. And, at times in American history, the Fourth Estate has served us very well, especially when it reveals what the government wishes to hide. Too often, however, the institution of the news media has been subservient to the state, such as during the run-up to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 (to cite one egregious example among many).

Now, we have the Russia narrative. I have no doubt that Russia “meddled” in our election, nor that the Trump administration was complicit. (I assume that both campaigns — Republican *and* Democrat — acted in ways that were, if not demonstrably criminal, at least underhanded and unethical. Politics is a dirty business.) The issue for me, however, is not foreign meddling, but rather the failure of the mainstream press to do their job in revealing our own corruption. They focus on Putin and Russia as the bad guys, while ignoring the sad history of the American Empire.

Too often, the American Empire has used its power to subvert democracy and the ideals of equality and justice — overtly and covertly, legally and illegally, domestically and internationally. It has done so in the name of “national security,” which should mean protecting the American people, but actually means maintaining and increasing the power and dominance of the American state. To cite one obvious example, if national security really meant a concern for the safety of people, the American government would have moved heaven and earth to end the threat of nuclear war. It didn’t, hasn’t, and apparently won’t. Why? Because nuclear weapons are part of the Empire’s power.

This is where I differ most strongly from a large segment of Trump’s base. I judge the American Empire to have been a bad idea from the start and the likely cause of our eventual downfall. My perception is that most of Trump’s supporters love the American Empire. But it’s not just Trump’s base that feels this way. By and large, most of the American public seems to believe that America deserves to rule the world and that whatever we do is justified. Some Americans are unquestioning patriots and believe in the infallible goodness of America. Others acknowledge that America has not always lived up to its ideals, but that in balance we have been an exemplary force for good. My study of history challenges that view. I want America to live up to its ideals, and whitewashing our serious failures to do so doesn’t sit well with me.

Of all America's considerable problems, the one that most disturbs me is the descent into deeply polarized tribalism within the population. A functioning democracy requires acceptance and practice of two norms by both politicians and the public: *mutual toleration* and *forbearance*. Mutual toleration means seeing one's opponents as honorable and treating them with a modicum of respect. Forbearance means self-restraint in the exercise of power, not kicking your opponent in the teeth when you're on top and he's down. That's not just good manners and fair play, it's understanding that having the advantage is almost never permanent. Tolerance and restraint minimize the ravages of vengeance that all too often accompany reversals of power. Over the past three decades, however, these norms have been shattered in American politics and public discourse.

Whether or not America is still a democracy, the only way I see us reinstating a more harmonious balance between our conflicted ideals (equality and wealth) is by returning to reasonable tolerance and forbearance. For that to happen, we cannot remain divided into warring tribes. Although we will disagree, we need to find enough commonality to regard *all* Americans as part of "Us." If only *some* Americans (those who are most like us or with whom we agree) qualify as "Us," with others castigated as "Them," then the chances of saving ourselves and our country from inevitable ruin go right down the tubes.

If Trump were to be impeached and convicted following factual revelations from the Mueller investigation or any other legal proceeding currently underway, Trump's base would go absolutely ape shit. They would scream foul, howling (and fully believing) that Trump was an innocent, or, at worst, not-quite-innocent victim of a criminal conspiracy by the corrupt Deep State. They would certainly be correct that Trump's opposition wanted to dethrone him.

My concern is not that Trump and his minions in the administration or Congress would protest. Screw them. What worries me is that 100 million Americans who are already angry would feel cheated again. I'm not sure what might happen, but it wouldn't be good. Trump may yet wear out his welcome, and even his supporters might tire of him. I think they should have that chance.

Do I think that Trump deserves to be removed from office? Absolutely, but not by Congress or the courts. Instead, he should be removed by the will of the voting public expressed at the ballot box on election day in 2020. Even that eventuality provides no guarantee that Americans will unite in fuller, more inclusive, and humane ways, to celebrate our diversity and demand that our country be run as if we all mattered. I worry, however, that impeachment would close off that possibility by irreparably pitting us against one another.

As a result, I'm currently against impeachment, even though every day of the Trump Presidency is loathsome to me.