

## Making Sense of...Impeachment

### Overview:

- In late September 2019, Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced that the House of Representatives would begin a formal impeachment inquiry against President Trump. The inquiry, [as announced by the Speaker's office](#), is predicated on the claim that the President committed a “betrayal of his oath of office” relating to a recent whistleblower complaint, among other charges.
- As described in the Constitution, here is a summary of the impeachment process: If an elected official commits an offense deemed impeachable, the House of Representatives can vote to impeach that person; the House will draft “Articles of Impeachment” – one for each perceived violation. Should the person be impeached on any of those Articles, by a simple majority vote in the House, they will be tried in the Senate and removed from office if convicted by two-thirds of Senators.
- Only three presidents have faced significant threats of impeachment, and only two have been impeached. Andrew Johnson (1868) and Bill Clinton (1998) were both impeached by the House of Representatives, but neither were removed from office. [Richard Nixon was likely to be impeached before he resigned from office](#) (1974).

### Readings:

- [Impeachment](#), The House of Representatives, Office of the Historian
- [How the Impeachment Process Works](#), NY Times
- [Fast Facts: Impeachment](#), CNN
- [Impeachment, American Style](#), The New Yorker
- [Trump Impeachment Inquiry: The Short, Medium, and Long Story](#), BBC News
- [How would an Impeachment Inquiry Against Donald Trump Work?](#), Politifact

### Questions for discussion:

- In the New Yorker piece above, Cass Sunstein addresses the potential ambiguity of “high crimes and misdemeanors” as criteria for impeachment. Given the reading, what sorts of offenses might rise to that level?
- What, if anything, concerns you about this situation?
- Do you believe that the branches of the U.S. government have an appropriate amount of checks and balances? Why or why not?
- Do the actions of President Trump, Speaker Pelosi, or the whistleblower strengthen or undermine democracy in any way? How?
- If we can assume that conviction in a Senate run by the President’s party is unlikely in today’s polarized climate, should that impact whether the House of Representatives decides to impeach at all?
- Why do you believe impeachment is an option for the U.S. government? How has it been used in the past, and what do you see as the benefits and drawbacks for this power?