

# CIVICS IN REAL LIFE

Civics is all around us. There is a lot to know about the government and how "We the People" interact with the government and each other. Let's help each other expand our civic literacy.

# Impeachment

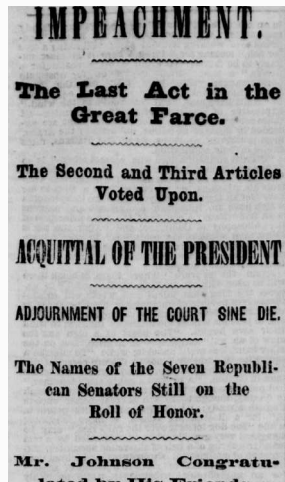
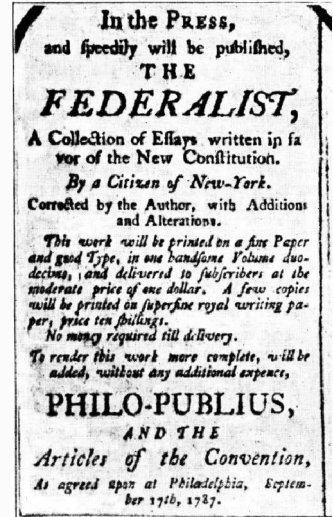
What happens when a public official, who may be appointed or elected, is accused of engaging in conduct that might be considered to be a 'high crime and misdemeanor'? One might hope they would resign, but when that does not happen, the U.S. Constitution provides the means to do so: impeachment and conviction.

Alexander Hamilton himself, in [Federalist #65](#), described the importance of impeachment and when it should happen:

***"A well-constituted court for the trial of impeachments is an object not more to be desired than difficult to be obtained in a government wholly elective. The subjects of its jurisdiction are those offenses which proceed from the misconduct of public men, or, in other words, from the abuse or violation of some public trust."***

One of the most common misconceptions about the [impeachment process](#) is that it automatically removes an official from office. However, that is not the case. Impeachment means the bringing of charges, so for an impeached official to be removed, they must first be convicted. At its most basic, the process is twofold: Typically, the Judiciary Committee in the U.S. House of Representatives drafts what are known as 'articles of impeachment' and presents them to the full House for a vote. On occasion, another House committee may draft the articles. In the impeachment of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, the articles were [drafted by the House Committee on Homeland Security](#). Articles of impeachment provide the members of the House the opportunity to review the accusations against the official, and they vote either for or against them. If there is a majority vote in favor of the articles, the official is impeached.

Remember, however, that impeachment does not mean removal. According to the [U.S. Constitution](#), only the U.S. Senate may remove an impeached official from office, and for that to happen, the Senate must convict based on the accusations listed in the articles of impeachment. The impeached official has the opportunity to defend themselves against the accusations, and two-thirds of the Senate must agree to convict. If a person is convicted and removed from office, they cannot hold any future federal offices. This means that a president impeached and removed from office after their first term cannot run for a second term or for a seat in the U.S. Congress.



anticipated. Before the verdict on the second article was known a great interest was expressed in the way that Senator Ross would vote. It was plain to be seen that everybody was uncertain as to how Mr. Ross intended to act on the remaining ten articles, but when the telegram arrived stating that Ross "had voted all right," which was considered to be important enough to send to the President, although a few minutes more would have given the whole vote, the gratification afforded by the little scrap of intelligence was perfectly evident. When it was at length announced that the High Court of Impeachment had adjourned without day the habitual dignity and reserve of the Presidential Mansion was slightly unbecoming, and officers, clerks, ushers and messengers all united in a subdued but heartful interchange of congratulations. The officers of the staff and the private secretaries suspended their duties, the clerks left their papers, and Mr. Cushman, the usually self-possessed usher at the President's door, left his post for once to join in the general rejoicing.

From this time until a late hour to-night the friends of the President crowded to the White House to congratulate him on his vindication. All were received by Mr. Johnson with his usual dignified though cordial greeting. Not a word of exultation or an expression of triumph escaped him; nothing that could be construed into the dark designs which the radicals have been accustomed to predict would be carried into execution in the event of his acquittal. When asked if he intended to take any measures to expel Mr. Stanton, now that the Senate has acquiesced in his removal, he replied that he thought no harsh measures would be necessary. Mr. Stanton, he thought, would appreciate his true position and would retire voluntarily. To the question of

While it is most often associated with attempting to remove a president from office, it's important to remember that according to Article II, Section 4 of the U.S. Constitution, "The President, Vice President and all civil Officers of the United States, shall be removed from Office on Impeachment for, and Conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors." Essentially, this means that individuals subject to [Senate confirmation](#), such as judges, Cabinet officials, and other appointed members of the Executive Branch may be impeached, in addition to the president and vice-president. Interestingly, as a result of a Senate determination in [1797](#), members of Congress are NOT considered 'civil officers' and so cannot be impeached. They may, however, be removed by other constitutional means.

Between 1787 and 2024, the House of Representatives has impeached only 21 public officials: 15 judges (including a Supreme Court justice), 2 Cabinet secretaries, 1 senator (before it was determined that members of Congress were not civil officers), and 3 presidents. [Of these 21](#), eight were convicted and removed by the Senate. As Secretary Myorkas' impeachment occurred on February 13, 2024, his trial in the Senate

is forthcoming. Interestingly, the last time a [cabinet secretary was impeached was in 1876](#). While three presidents have been impeached, none have ever been convicted.

As the numbers suggest, impeachment of public officials is relatively rare, and even when it happens, it does not necessarily lead to removal from office. However, it remains one of the most important tools for ensuring that our public officials fulfill their obligations under the U.S. Constitution to [We, the People](#).

**Learn MORE** about impeachment.  
Free registration may be required.

- [The History of Impeachment](#), from the Library of Congress
- [The Power of Impeachment](#), from Constitution Annotated
- [How Does Impeachment Work](#), from TED-ED

**To Think and To Do:** As you learned here, the House impeaches and the Senate convicts to remove. Why might the Framers of the Constitution have made the removal of public officials a two-step process that involves separate roles for each congressional chamber?



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