

America's Political Polarisation

As the US House of Representatives went through many rounds to elect a speaker on the second anniversary of the Capital Hill riots, the Special Select Committee that was established with investigating the events of the riot, gave its verdict.

The committee concluded that on the 6th of January 2021, following the defeat of then US President Donald Trump in the presidential election, a mob of his supporters attacked the Capitol Building in Washington, DC. The insurrectionists were seeking to keep Trump in power by preventing a joint session of Congress from counting the electoral college votes to formalise the victory of President-elect Joe Biden. More than 2,000 rioters entered the building; many of whom occupied, vandalised and looted. The insurrectionists assaulted Capitol Police officers and attempted to locate lawmakers in order to capture them. The attack has been viewed as an assault on democracy and everything the US stands for. For the first time in US history, an assault on the US system took place as many refused to accept their candidate had lost in the general election.

The Joe Biden administration and new members of the Senate established a special hearing Select Committee to Investigate the attack on Capitol Hill. The Committee interviewed over a thousand people and reviewed over a million documents. Some members of Trump's inner circle cooperated with the committee, while others defied it. For refusing to testify, Steve Bannon was sentenced to prison but remains free on appeal. The Committee subpoenaed Trump to testify, identifying him as *"the center of the first and only effort by any US President to overturn an election and obstruct the peaceful transition of power."* In defiance of the Committee's subpoena, Trump refused to testify and sued the Committee to block the subpoena.

What has become clear from all the hearings and testimonies is that Trump and his associates pushed the "Big Lie" that President Joe Biden's 2020 presidential win was illegitimate, based on the narrative that the election was a fraud. Through testimony, the House committee argued all of these efforts happened while many advisers and White House staff around the former president told him and his associates that the election was won, fairly, by Biden.

Trump and his allies led a multifaceted conspiracy to overturn the election. The initial 6th of January hearings presented evidence on how Trump and his allies planned, promoted, and paid for this conspiracy. While the attack on the Capitol took place in 2021, the evidence shows Trump and his allies plotted to overturn the election for months, with a strategy laid out in briefings, memos, and PowerPoints. Rather than honouring the election results, Donald Trump launched a conspiracy to remain in power and overturn the electoral result.

Trump and his Make America Great Again (MAGA) allies threatened state election officials who refused to break the law and schemed to replace them with fake

electors. The committee found Trump repeatedly asked the US Department of Justice to launch an investigation into non-existent election fraud and publicly ran a campaign against Vice President Mike Pence for refusing to sabotage the election results. Trump was told repeatedly that these activities were impossible and illegal; he did them anyway.

In a last attempt to block the peaceful transition of power, Donald Trump summoned a mob to Washington, D.C. He invited his supporters to the White House on the 6th of January while fully aware of their plan to storm the US Capitol. When they marched to the building, many were heavily armed and under the impression the president would be joining them. The 6th of January insurrection was filled with carnage and chaos. It was a violent attack by those emboldened by white supremacy. All the while, the president sat, watched, and refused to call for help, despite repeated pleas from his top advisers and members of Congress. In fact, the testimony revealed that he expressed support for the crowd's chants for the vice president to be hanged after Pence upheld the US Constitution.

What the Capitol Hill hearings show is a man who by hook or by crook bent all the rules and expected all around him to execute his intentions to remain in power, irrespective of the 2020 electoral result. Despite making wild claims of electoral fraud, Trump has been unable to present much evidence to this claim and his own advisors explained to Trump he has no case.

The Select Committee has recommended the Justice Department to begin criminal proceedings against Donald Trump, the first in American history against any President. It remains to be seen if this does take place. But more worryingly for the US is the polarisation at the heart of the US political system with the recent circus to elect the speaker of the US House of Representatives showing how deep the divide has become. America's political polarisation is tearing it apart.

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