

The Worst President Ever

And why Trump's ballroom will some day double as a community center for kids

[Jonathan Alter](#)

Feb 15, 2026



Presidents Day is a good day to rank presidents. There's debate about the top three — my choices are Lincoln, Washington, and FDR — but no suspense about who's bringing up the rear. Even if he racks up an achievement or two in the next couple of years, we can be confident that Donald Trump will be viewed as the worst president in U.S. history, with Richard Nixon now a distant second.

Yes, historians said that in his first term, and more than 70 million Americans ignored his coup attempt and returned him to office. But Trump has no road back now; the country as a whole is finished with him. This period reminds me of 1943, when the Allies knew we would eventually defeat the fascists, but only after a lot more death and destruction. It took nearly three years then, too.

With every day bringing a fresh outrage, it's hard to know what will stick over time. My guess is that historians of the future (and yes, we'll still have them) will focus on three surpassing abuses:

- The violation of his oath to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution.
- His use of the power of the federal government to threaten and punish his critics.
- His gobsmacking corruption.

Let's start with the Constitution.

By trying to send members of Congress, journalists, and others to jail for criticizing him (after claiming in his inaugural address to be committed to free speech), Trump is trampling on the First Amendment. By building an American gulag of detention centers for migrants guilty only of non-violent misdemeanors (crossing the border illegally), he is violating the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments, which guarantee due process. And by authorizing ICE to enter homes without judicial warrants, he is ignoring the Fourth Amendment. That's not even mentioning all the laws he has broken after swearing an oath to uphold and execute them.

Remember Louis XIV's "L'État, c'est moi" ("The State is me")? That's Trump.

In his second term, he and his lackeys have leveraged every power of the executive branch to harass, intimidate, extort, and prosecute anyone who dares oppose him. "No Kings" resonates powerfully because it captures the essence of Trump: He's a walking reversal of the American Revolution.

And of course, with Trump, it's all about the Benjamins.

He's already raked in more than \$1.2 billion from favor-seeking foreigners and tech bros who lack character. There are dozens of examples of his profiting off the presidency, but here's one of the worst: World Liberty Financial is a cryptocurrency platform co-founded by the Trump family and Steve Witkoff, now Trump's top diplomat. A sheikh from the United Arab Emirates bought a 49 percent stake for \$500 million just before the Trump Administration reversed a longstanding national security policy and approved the export of advanced AI chips to the UAE, which will likely share them with China. This makes Warren Harding's Teapot Dome scandal look like Pinochle.

The good news is that we might be witnessing what Bill Scher of the *Washington Monthly* calls "[The Ephemeral Presidency](#)." Some of the vandalism —like that committed against USAID and the EPA — will take years to fix. But by signing easily reversible executive orders instead of hard-to-repeal new laws, Trump has chosen shock and awe over permanently shaping the government.

Now smart Democrats are beginning to figure out how to make us stronger at the broken places. It didn't take Presidents Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter long to remove the stain of Watergate. They restored the independence of the Justice Department, which had been politicized by Nixon, who wiretapped his enemies. The guardrails constructed during their presidencies lasted for four decades. We can rebuild them and, by thinking anew across a range of problems, turn trauma into transformational change.

Same for our global alliances, which — contrary to much recent analysis — are based not on trust, but mutual interest. The post-Trump world order won't be dominated by the U.S.; Trump has dealt a serious blow to our power abroad. But the might-makes-right view he shares with Putin and Xi is not the wave of the future. The next generation of leaders on both sides of the Atlantic will work well together again.



Only two schools in the country are named after Nixon: Richard M. Nixon Elementary School, Hiawatha, IA (L) and Nixon Elementary School Mt. Arlington, NJ (R)

In the meantime, what do we do about Trump? Democrats are understandably wary of impeaching him a third time; many voters would see it as a distraction from their economic concerns. Conviction in the Senate is a long shot even if Democrats sweep the midterms and, if somehow successful, would give incumbent President J.D. Vance a leg up in 2028.

So the best option is to impeach and convict Trump between Election Day, 2028 (assuming it brings a Democratic president) and Inauguration Day, 2029, with the help of new Democratic senators elected that year and sworn in by early January, plus a few Republican senators trying to get right with their constituents and their grandchildren. The Senate should make the conviction effective at 11:59 a.m. on January 20. That way, Trump is stained by removal from office, and Vance is remembered as the one-minute president who didn't even get the chance to be sworn in.

Of course, Trump's name will still be used as shorthand for this Era of Bad Feeling, just as Joe McCarthy's is for the early 1950s. But after he's gone, Washington will follow the example of New York and strip his name off of nearly everything he doesn't own. It'll eventually come off the Kennedy Center, and his new White House ballroom – doubling as a community center for local kids – will be named for no one.

In 1972, Nixon carried 49 states. Two years later, he was forced to resign, and today he is memorialized at just two elementary schools nationwide. ([JFK has over 100.](#)) The same will go for Donald Trump. Unless you count tour guides at Mar-a-Lago and a few Breitbart holdouts, Americans will move on, happy if they never hear that wretched name again.