U.S. Capitol

The 2020 election and the January 6 attack · September 18, 2026

Joe Biden won the 2020 election, receiving 306 certified electoral votes to Donald Trump's 232. The effort to overturn that result moved through court challenges, pressure on officials, false electoral certificates and an attack on Congress. On January 6, 2021, violence interrupted the counting of electoral votes; it did not change the winner.

Sources: [1]

The result and the failed challenges

Judge Stephanos Bibas · Appointed by Donald Trump

The official count established Biden's victory. The reviewed challenges did not substantiate fraud sufficient to change the outcome. That finding does not mean that no isolated unlawful vote occurred anywhere.

On November 27, 2020, the Third Circuit rejected the Trump campaign's Pennsylvania appeal. Judge Stephanos Bibas wrote: "Charges require specific allegations and then proof. We have neither here." Bibas was appointed by Trump. The opinion addressed the pleadings and requested relief; the campaign was not pursuing a fraud claim in that appeal.

Sources: [1], [3], [4]

Violence against police and Congress

Attackers breached the Capitol while Congress was counting electoral votes. Police faced assaults as members and staff sought safety. The disruption served the effort to prevent completion of the lawful count. Congress reconvened and completed its work early on January 7.

Individual guilty pleas establish admitted wrongdoing. Daniel Rodriguez pleaded guilty in February 2023 to four felonies, including his assault on Metropolitan Police Officer Michael Fanone with a stun gun. Julian Khater pleaded guilty to assaulting officers with a dangerous weapon after spraying police, including Brian Sicknick, with chemical irritant. Khater was not charged with causing Sicknick's death.

Trump's January 20, 2025 clemency proclamation pardoned January 6 offenses and commuted specified sentences. These later legal actions matter when describing punishment; they were not trial acquittals and do not erase the historical record of guilty pleas.

Sources: [2], [1], [5], [6], [7]

What Trump's own administration witnesses said

The House committee described Trump watching events unfold and delaying a public instruction to leave until his 4:17 p.m. video. Deputy National Security Adviser Matthew Pottinger called Trump's 2:24 p.m. attack on Pence "fuel being poured on the fire." Deputy Press Secretary Sarah Matthews described that tweet as "pouring gasoline on the fire". These are identified witnesses' assessments, not a finding about an unobservable private emotion.

Trump also used peaceful language in his rally speech and subsequent messages. That context belongs beside the committee's evidence about his pressure on Pence and delayed response. The committee's conclusions are congressional findings, not a criminal verdict.

Sources: [2]

False electoral certificates

Trump allies sought to substitute certificates from would-be Trump electors for the certified Biden electors. The central legal issue was using false claims of lawful electoral authority to change the count—not simply discussing a challenge. Wording and conduct differed among states and participants.

Kenneth Chesebro pleaded guilty in Georgia in October 2023 to conspiracy to file false documents. A June 2025 New York disciplinary decision records that plea and describes certificates falsely representing the signers as duly elected and qualified electors. This establishes an admitted unlawful act by that defendant; it is not a blanket judgment against every proposed elector or participant.

Sources: [8]

Potential violations and the legal record

Assaults on federal officers can violate 18 U.S.C. § 111. False electoral documents raise fraud, false-document and conspiracy issues; Chesebro's plea concerned Georgia's conspiracy and false-document statutes. For other participants, culpability requires evidence of their own acts, knowledge and intent. A relationship line, attendance at a rally or political affiliation alone cannot establish guilt.

The federal election case against Trump ended without a trial verdict. It was dismissed in November 2024 following the Justice Department's position against prosecuting a sitting president. That procedural outcome did not decide the factual merits. Obstruction allegations also require care: in Fischer, the Supreme Court held that § 1512(c)(2) requires the relevant connection to records, documents, objects or other things used in an official proceeding. Presence at the riot alone does not satisfy that test.

Sources: [8], [9], [10], [11]

Summation

The certified result, court decisions, eyewitness testimony and defendants' admissions establish an effort to overturn a lost election and a violent interruption of Congress. The evidence should be read by act and by person: established facts and guilty pleas carry different legal weight from allegations and potential conflicts.

Sources

[1] National Archives — 2020 Electoral College results

[2] House January 6 Committee — final report, executive summary and Chapter 8 (December 2022)

[3] Trump v. Boockvar — Third Circuit opinion (November 27, 2020)

[4] Federal Judicial Center — Stephanos Bibas appointment record

[5] Associated Press — Rodriguez guilty plea (February 14, 2023)

[6] PBS / Associated Press — Khater plea and sentencing (January 27, 2023)

[7] Presidential proclamation — January 6 pardons and commutations (January 20, 2025)

[8] New York Appellate Division — Matter of Chesebro (June 26, 2025)

[9] Reuters — federal election case dismissed (November 25, 2024)

[10] Supreme Court — Fischer v. United States (June 28, 2024)

[11] 18 U.S.C. § 111 — assaulting, resisting or impeding certain officers