

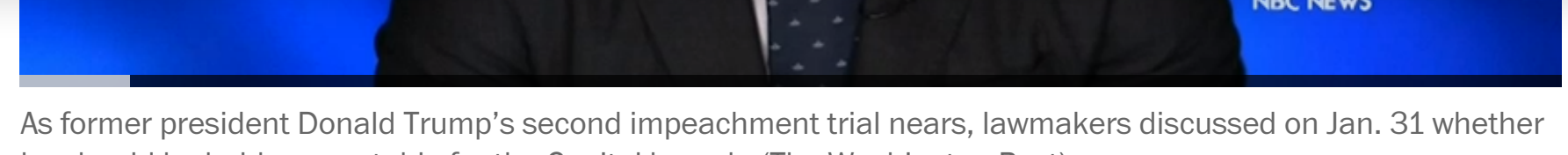
The Fix Analysis

# Republicans came within 90,000 votes of controlling all of Washington



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As former president Donald Trump's second impeachment trial nears, lawmakers discussed on Jan. 31 whether he should be held accountable for the Capitol breach. (The Washington Post)

By **Aaron Blake**

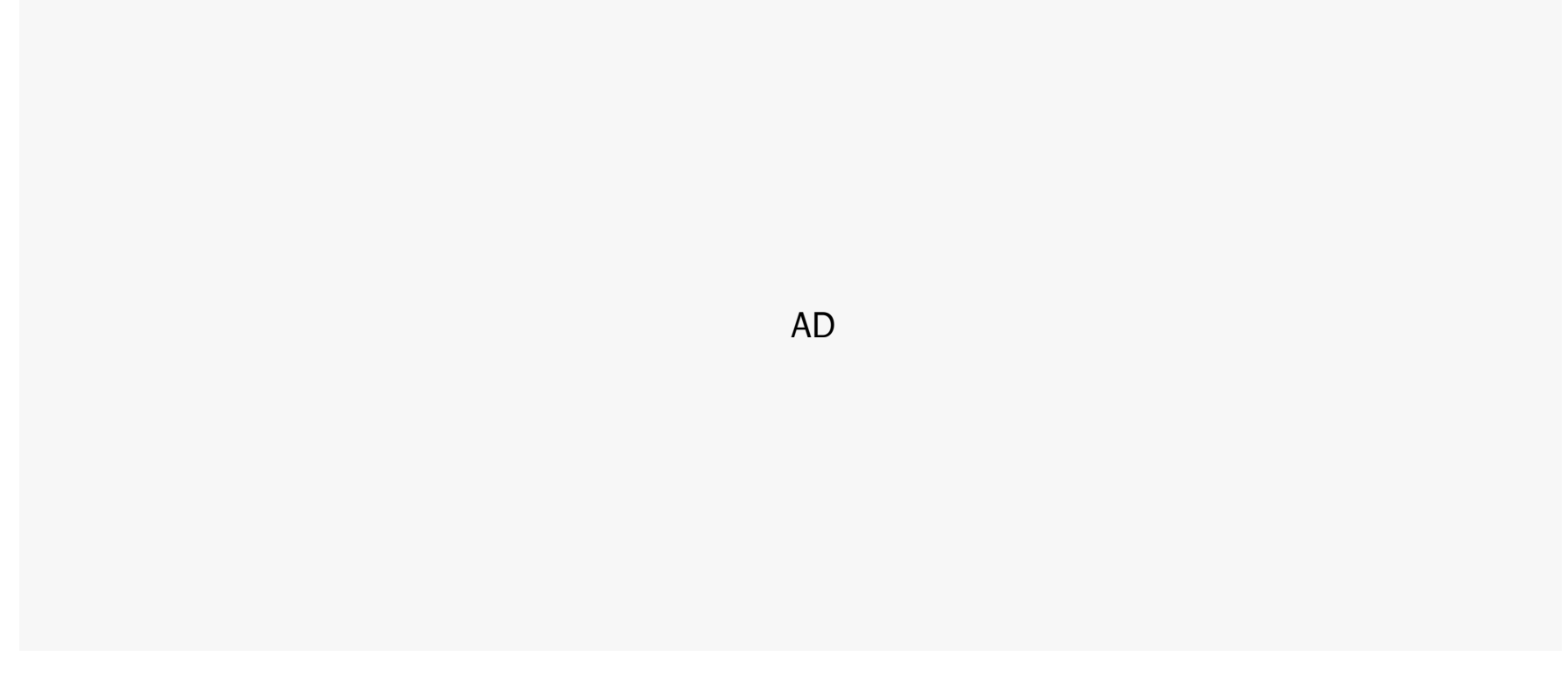
Feb. 9, 2021 at 1:03 p.m. CST

The 2020 election was bad for Republicans, full stop. For the [first time since 1932](#), a president came into office with both chambers of Congress under his party's control, and lost both of them and reelection. Democrats also have unified control of all three levers of power for the first time in a decade.

That said, post-election analysis often overstates just how dire the situation is for a political party. And that's certainly the case for Republicans and 2020, as they confront their post-Trump reality.

The reality, though, is far from that. In fact, Republicans came, at most, 43,000 votes from winning each of the three levers of power. And that will surely temper any move toward drastic corrective action vis-a-vis former president Donald Trump.

We got the final results from the last outstanding House race on Monday, with [former congresswoman Claudia Tenney \(R\) returning to Congress](#) after defeating Rep. Anthony Brindisi (D) in New York by 109 votes. The result means the House stands at 222 to 213 in favor of the Democrats. (These numbers include three vacancies for which the seats are very unlikely to change hands.)



AD

The Democrats' narrow retention of the House is surely one of the biggest surprises of 2020. In an election in which most analysts expected the Democrats to gain seats, they wound up losing 14, including virtually all of the "toss-ups." While the GOP lost the presidential race and control of the Senate, we very nearly had a much different outcome.

While Democrat Joe Biden won the popular vote by more than four points and the electoral college 306 to 232, the result was much closer to flipping than that would suggest. Biden won the three decisive states — Arizona, Georgia and Wisconsin — by 0.6 percentage points or less, which was similar to Trump's 2016 victory. If you flip fewer than 43,000 votes across those three states, the electoral college is tied 269 to 269. In that case, Trump would probably have won, given that the race would be decided by one vote for each House delegation, of which Republicans control more.

There are several reasons to argue that Biden has a mandate, including that he [won more eligible voters than any candidate in half a century](#) and won the highest percentage for any challenger to an incumbent president [since 1932](#). But the fact remains that we weren't *that* far away from a second Trump term.

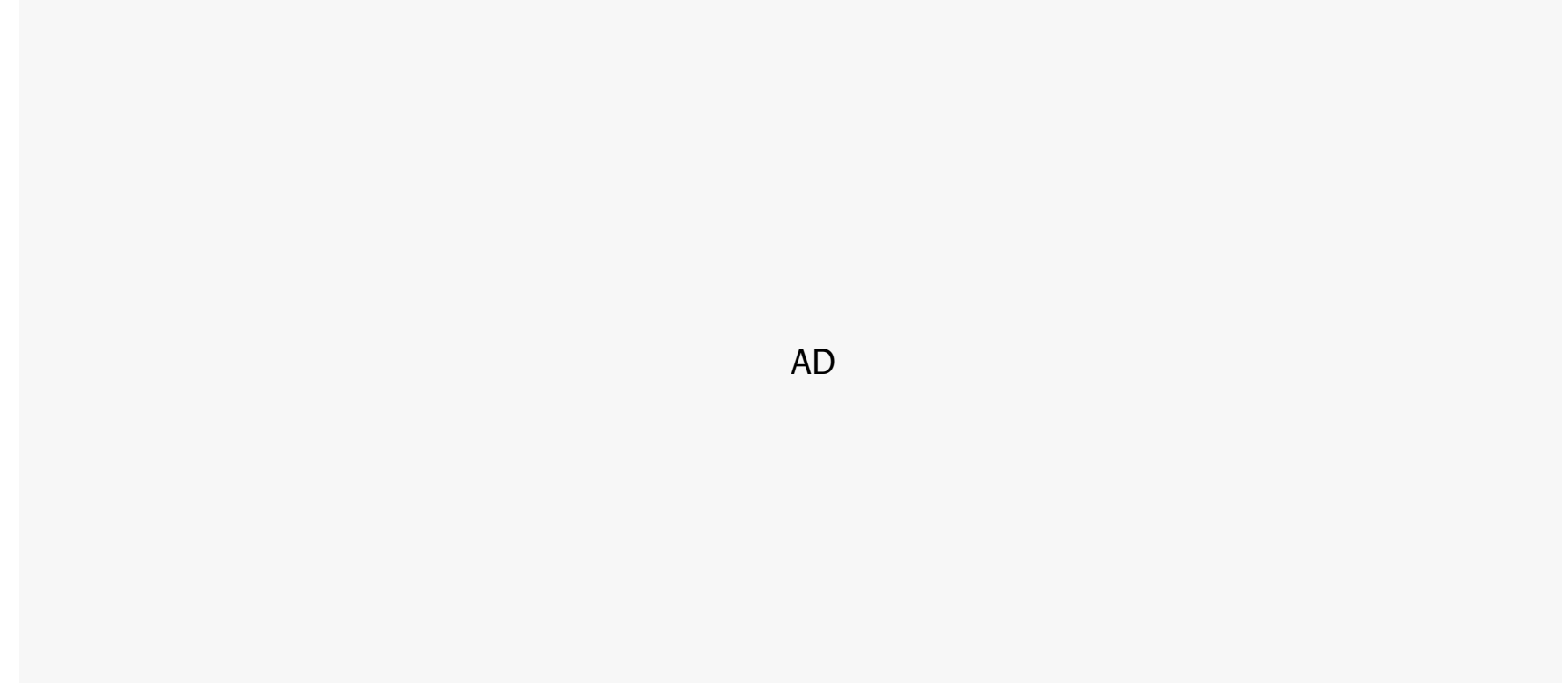


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The number of votes to flip the result was similar in the House. As the Cook Political Report's David Wasserman noted in light of Tenney's win, [fewer than 32,000 votes could have flipped](#) the five seats that Republicans would have needed to win the House majority — Illinois's 17th District, Iowa's 3rd, New Jersey's 7th, Texas's 15th and Virginia's 7th.

Technically, this would have required a bigger shift, because Texas's 15th was decided by nearly 3 percentage points in a low-turnout district. But even just looking at percentages, Republicans could have flipped the House by moving five districts just 2.2 percentage points to the right.

The closest of all, of course, was the Senate. Democrats won effective control of the chamber by getting to a 50-50 split and having Vice President Harris break the tie. But even fewer votes could have led to a different result.



AD

While incumbent David Perdue (R-Ga.) lost the closest Senate race in a runoff last month with now-Sen. Jon Ossoff (D-Ga.) by about 55,000 votes, he previously came very close to avoiding the runoff altogether. On Election Day, he took 49.7 percent of the vote — fewer than 14,000 votes from winning the race outright. That would have foreclosed any chance Democrats had at winning the Senate.

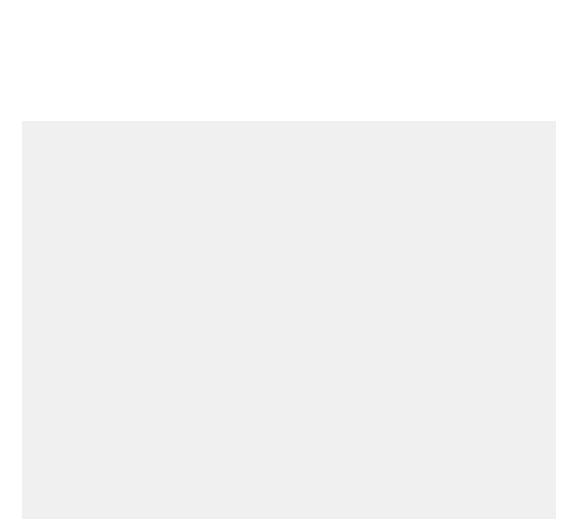
So, 43,000 votes for president, 32,000 votes for the House and 14,000 votes for the Senate. Shifts of 0.6 percent for president, 2.2 percent for the House, and 0.3 percent for the Senate.

Republicans might well want to make some changes given how much ground they have lost under Trump and their continued popular-vote losses in presidential races (winning that just once in the past eight elections). But politicians make calculations and respond to incentives, and given the undoubtedly arduous process of distancing themselves from Trump and potentially alienating his many supporters, such a close loss might not provide as much of an impetus for change as some might imagine.

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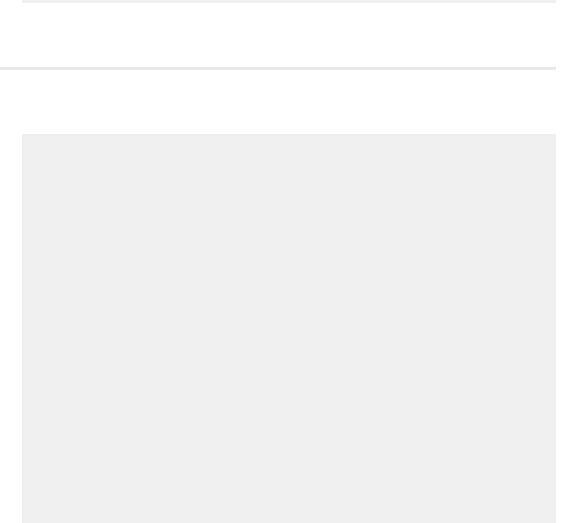
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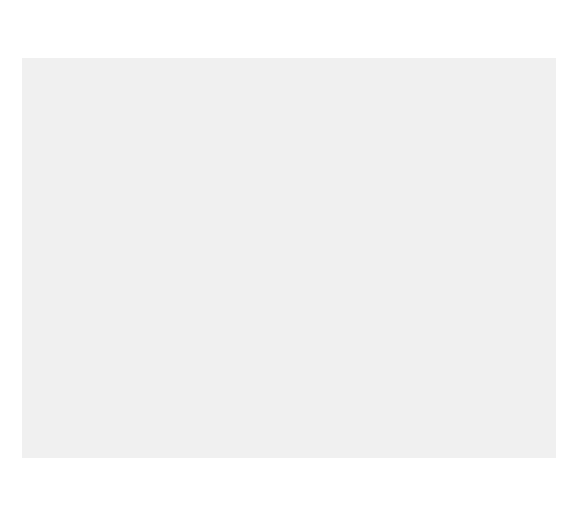


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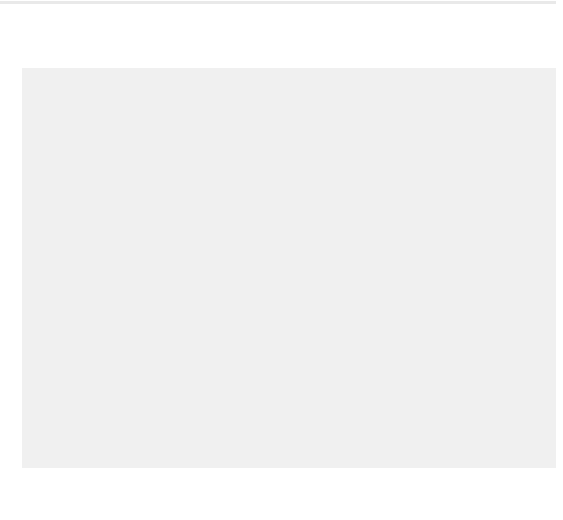
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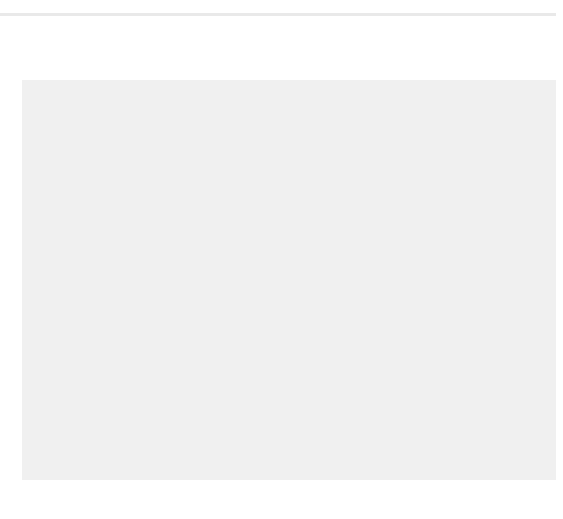
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