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Former President Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, was found guilty on all 34 felony counts by a Manhattan jury agreeing unanimously that he falsified business records in paying hush money to an adult film actress in the closing days of the 2016 campaign.

Various Catholic legal and political experts noted the conviction is historic, marking the first time in American history that a current or former president has been convicted on criminal charges, with potential ramifications for the U.S.

Trump took no questions from reporters after the verdict was delivered, but told them that the trial was "rigged" and "disgraceful" and alleged it was a scheme by a political opponent to hurt his election prospects.

"But the real verdict is going to be Nov. 5 by the people," he said in reference to the election.

The case concerned a $130,000 hush money payment made by Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen to adult film star Stormy Daniels, who claimed she slept with the married Trump in 2006, in the final weeks of the 2016 presidential election. Trump characterized his reimbursement of the payout by Cohen as legal expenses. Cohen pleaded guilty in 2018 to tax fraud, campaign finance violations and making false statements to Congress in connection to that payment.

John White, a professor of politics at The Catholic University of America in Washington, told OSV News that the conviction marked "a historic day in American history."

"For the first time, a former president is a convicted felon," White said. "Twelve ordinary citizens of diverse backgrounds reached a verdict. Trump has every right to appeal and will do so. But in a legal system where unanimity was required and a single juror could have resulted in a hung jury, Trump was convicted."

But while Trump's conviction is historic, the difference it makes in the presidential election is less certain.

White said the outcome also marks "a day of reckoning for the Republican Party."

"Time and again, Republicans empowered Trump," White said. "It's certainly possible to continue to believe in a populism that believes in low tax rates, high tariffs, tough

on crime laws, and immigration reform. But Republicans didn't need Trump to lead that charge — and still don't. Their current dilemma is of their own making."

James Patterson, chair of the politics department at Ave Maria University in Florida, told OSV News that the verdict "likely makes no difference in the likely outcome of the election."

"President Joe Biden is unpopular, and this verdict does not somehow make him more popular," Patterson said. "It might make Trump less popular on the margins, but my sense is that already likely voters knew of this case and its likely outcome. The American voter of 2024 is not as likely to punish a presidential candidate for paying hush money to an adult entertainer as voters past. Such a development in the American moral sensibility seems regrettable, but here we are all the same."

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Robert P. George, a Catholic American legal scholar and McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University, told OSV News that despite his criticisms of the former president, he also had concerns about the process of the trial.

"I have never voted for Donald Trump," George said. "Indeed, the record will show that I am, and have long been, one of his harshest critics. I must, however, say that the 'lawfare' waged against him for transparently political reasons, leading now to a criminal conviction, constitutes a serious threat to our constitutional order, as serious as any threat posed by the former president's own behavior."

"We in the United States do not confect pretexts to prosecute our political opponents and put them in jail," he said. "We do not use the legal system to interfere in elections. But that is now what is happening. The fact that the Trump conviction will almost certainly be quashed on appeal due to errors by the trial judge does not mitigate the threat. We have taken a step here down a very dark road."

But Michael Tyler, communications director for the Biden-Harris campaign, said in a statement, "In New York today, we saw that no one is above the law."

"Donald Trump has always mistakenly believed he would never face consequences for breaking the law for his own personal gain," Tyler said. "But today's verdict does not change the fact that the American people face a simple reality. There is still only

one way to keep Donald Trump out of the Oval Office: at the ballot box. Convicted felon or not, Trump will be the Republican nominee for president."

Tyler argued Trump is "running an increasingly unhinged campaign of revenge and retribution" and that "the American people will reject it this November."

Additional Catholic reaction has varied across social media.

Steven P. Millies, a professor of public theology at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, who also writes about the church's relationship to politics, wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter, that "ordinary citizens working in the system held a (former president) to the people's laws. This is a great day in America."

CatholicVote, a GOP-aligned advocacy group that endorsed Trump's 2024 campaign, accused Biden in a post on X of "locking up his political opponent." But Trump has yet to be sentenced and was released.

Trump's sentencing is scheduled for July 11, a date after the first scheduled debate between Trump and President Joe Biden, and four days prior to the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee.