



POLITICS • DONALD TRUMP

Fact-Checking What Donald Trump Said in His 2024 Interviews With TIME

21 MINUTE READ



Victor J. Blue for TIME

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APRIL 30, 2024 7:00 AM EDT

Read our full cover story on Donald Trump [here](#). You can also read the transcript of the interviews [here](#) and a full fact check [here](#).

Former President Donald Trump sat down for a lengthy interview with TIME on April 12 at his Mar-a-Lago Club in Palm Beach, Fla. He continued the discussion in a follow-up call on April 27. During those exchanges with TIME national politics reporter Eric Cortellessa, Trump made a number of claims that lacked context or were not supported by facts.

Below is a review of dozens of Trump's statements from both interviews. TIME has also published [the transcripts](#) of those conversations.

What Trump Said: “What's happening to us, with probably 15 million and maybe as many as 20 million by the time Biden's out. Twenty million people, many of them from jails, many of them from prisons, many of them from mental institutions.”



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BY GILLETTE

The Facts: Trump is talking about the undocumented population. The current undocumented population is not known. The Department of Homeland Security estimated there were 11.4 million as of 2018. **Several groups** have estimated the population is between 11 and 11.5 million as of 2022.

What Trump Said: “These aren’t civilians. These are people that aren’t legally in our country.”

The Facts: A civilian is commonly defined as anyone who is not an active member of the armed forces. Immigration status does not factor into whether someone is a civilian. Any person in the U.S., regardless of their immigration status, may be entitled to many of the same **constitutional rights** as U.S. citizens, including the **right to due process** and equal protection.

What Trump Said: “It was done by Obama in a form of jails, you know, prisons.”

The Facts: Trump was talking about building migrant detention camps. The Obama administration **did hold** undocumented migrants in detention facilities. In spring 2014, there was a wave of illegal border crossings by migrants fleeing Central America. After border detention cells in McAllen, Texas, filled to capacity, border patrol agents placed immigrant families in “sally port” areas outside of the detention centers. Amid an outcry over the dismal conditions, the government converted a nearby empty warehouse into a new holding facility.

Read More: *[Trump Hits Netanyahu on Oct. 7; Says Other Israeli Leaders 'Could Do a Good Job'](#)*

What Trump Said: “I completed what I said I was going to do, much more than I said I was going to do ... I built much more wall than I thought necessary.”

The Facts: Throughout the 2016 campaign, Donald Trump **promised** to build a wall across the southern border and have Mexico pay for it. Neither happened.

Trump was unable to secure border wall funding from Congress and instead directed military funds to construct portions of it. By the time he left office, the Trump administration **built** roughly 450 miles of border barriers along the U.S. Mexico border, much of it replacing dilapidated barriers that were already there. America's southern border **stretches** for nearly 2,000 miles across four separate states.

What Trump Said: “China was going along making \$500-600 billion a year and nobody was ever even mentioning it until I came along.”

The Facts: In 2017, the year Trump took office, the U.S. imported \$505 billion from China and exported \$130 billion, leaving the US.-China trade deficit at **\$375 billion**. In 2018, the deficit rose to \$418 billion, the highest it's been since 1985. In Dec. 2020, just before Trump left office, the trade deficit was \$308 billion.

What Trump Said: “We ended up handing over a higher stock market substantially than when COVID first came in.”

The Facts: The CDC reported its first COVID cases in the U.S. in January 2020. On Jan. 2, 2020, the S&P 500 closed at **3257.85**. When President Biden took office in January, 2021, the S&P 500 closed at 3851.85, up 594 points.

What Trump Said: “We had the greatest economy in history. And Moody's acknowledges that.”

The Facts: Moody's did not say Trump “had the greatest economy in history.” In Oct. 2019, the company's **modeling predicted** that Trump would win in 2020 if the economy held up.

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What Trump Said: “China was dumping massive amounts of steel into our country. And we saved the steel industry.”

The Facts: In March 2018, Trump imposed a 25% tariff on imported steel, aiming to increase demand for domestic steel. The tariff temporarily drove up steel prices in the U.S., diminishing demand and sparking job cuts in U.S. industries reliant on steel, such as Michigan auto makers like General Motors and Ford. Entire steel **operations shuttered**, including the Great Lakes Works, where 1,250 people lost their jobs. As domestic steel prices increased, increasingly competitive imports drove the prices down again, and Trump rolled back the tariff for multiple countries in response.

Toward the end of Trump’s term, the steel industry overall **employed** 1,900 fewer steel workers than it did when he took office. One study found Trump’s steel and aluminum tariffs resulted in **an estimated net loss** of 75,000 American manufacturing jobs within a year. Michigan was hit especially hard—between the time Trump announced the steel tariffs and August 2020, the state’s metal manufacturers alone employed **7,300** fewer people.

What Trump Said: “We can’t do business with India, because they charged us with such a big tariff. It was over 100%.”

The Facts: Trump was talking about high tariffs India previously levied on motorcycles that affected U.S.-based Harley Davidson. Trump has brought up this specific tariff before. In 2017, India levied a 100% tariff on motorcycles, however most of the company's motorcycles were assembled at their factory outside of New Delhi, **exempting** the company from import tariffs. (The plant **shut down** in 2020.) India later lowered its tariff on imported motorcycles to 50%, according to **2022 data**.

What Trump Said: “Mexico has taken 31% of our auto manufacturing auto business.”

The Facts: Trump has said this before, **including** in a 2019 interview on CNBC. The independent research firm, the Center for Automotive Research, told the network they knew of no data or examples to support Trump's claim. "There are no cases that I can name where an automaker closed a plant in the U.S., moved that work, opened a new plant in Mexico, and you can definitely call it a replacement," said one of the group's researchers **Bernard Swiecki**. That said, the Mexican auto manufacturing industry has grown in recent years. As of the end of 2023, Mexico was the world's **seventh largest** passenger vehicle manufacturer. Eighty-eight percent of those vehicles are exports, with 76 percent going into the United States, **according** to the International Trade Administration.

What Trump Said: "I even built the embassy. And it's a beautiful embassy for a lot less money than anybody ever thought possible."

The Facts: Trump is talking about his decision to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusaem, which he announced in December 2017. In early 2018, Trump **claimed** the U.S. would spend only \$200,000 to \$300,000 on the project. The embassy opened in May 2018, with the U.S. originally spending just under \$400,000 on modifications to the site. But just months after the opening, Desbuild Limak, a Maryland-based firm, was awarded a \$21.2 million contract from the State Department to design an extension and security enhancements—upgrades that put the embassy's cost more than \$20 million over budget.

Read More: *Exclusive: Trump Says 'Anti-White Feeling' Is a Problem in the U.S.*

What Trump Said: "The people of Israel appreciate it. I have like a 98%—I have the highest approval numbers.

The Facts: Recent polls do not show Trump having a 98% approval rating in Israel. A **March 2024 survey** by Israeli television station Channel 12 found that 44% of Israelis would like to see Donald Trump return to the White House in 2025, and 30% would like to see Joe Biden serve a second term.

What Trump Said: “Every legal scholar for 53 years has said that issue is a state issue from a legal standpoint ... Every legal scholar, Democrat, Republican, and other wanted that issue back at the states. You know, *Roe v. Wade* was always considered very bad law. Very bad.”

The Facts: Not every legal scholar in the last half century has believed *Roe v. Wade* to be “very bad.” Many viewed the ruling as rightly decided, believing the implied right to privacy in the Constitution extended to medical procedures like abortions. Some scholars have previously **criticized** the decision for, among other reasons, being too narrow in scope.

What Trump Said: “You take a look at not only his criminal acts of taking a lot of money and being a Manchurian candidate ... He’s committed many crimes.”

The Facts: Trump was talking here about allegations he and other Republicans have made about President Joe Biden. House Republicans have led a year-long effort to impeach Biden, with the investigation largely focusing on the possibility of Biden’s involvement in the overseas business dealings of his son, Hunter Biden. The investigation has thus far produced no evidence of criminality.

What Trump Said: “It’s not even a criminal case.”

The Facts: Trump was talking about his ongoing trial in Manhattan, where he faces 34 felony counts of falsifying business records, connected to his role in a \$130,000 hush-money payment to adult film star, Stormy Daniels, ahead of the 2016 presidential election. New York statute considers the falsification of business records on its own to be a misdemeanor, but a felony if it was done in furtherance of another crime. The Manhattan District Attorney’s office alleges that Trump’s second crime stems from violations of election law. Trump has pleaded not guilty to the charges, as well as those in three other criminal cases. He is the first former U.S. President to face criminal charges of any kind.

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What Trump Said: “His head of the Justice Department, one of the top few people, was put into the DOJ. Fani, Mr. Wade, Fani’s lover, spent hours in Washington working on my case. The DOJ worked with Letitica James on my case. The DOJ worked with deranged Jack Smith. He’s a deranged person on my case ... It’s called election interference.”

The Facts: Trump was referring to Matthew Colangelo, a former senior official at the Justice Department who left the agency **to become** Senior Counsel to Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg. Before serving in the DOJ, Colangelo **worked** in the New York Attorney General’s office, where he led the office’s civil fraud inquiry into the former President and the Trump Organization. Trump supporters have suggested the connection is a sign that President Joe Biden had a hand in Bragg's prosecution against Trump. The DA has charged Trump with falsifying business records to conceal a hush money payment to a porn star during the 2016 election. No evidence of Biden’s involvement in the New York case has ever come to light.

There is likewise no evidence that Nathan Wade, a former prosecutor in the Fulton County indictment of Trump for election interference, or New York Attorney General Letitia James, colluded with Biden’s Justice Department in their respective cases.

In November 2022, Attorney General Merrick Garland **appointed** Jack Smith as Special Counsel overseeing the federal investigations into Trump’s attempt to overturn the 2020 election, and Trump’s handling of classified documents after he left office. The announcement came shortly after Trump announced he was running for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination. Special Counsels are appointed to ensure the independence of prosecutors when there is the potential for a conflict between the attorney general, who is a political appointee, and the subject of the investigation.



What Trump Said: “That was done by a political lawyer in front of a highly, in my opinion, a totally inappropriate judge, who was conflicted for a lot of reasons.”

The Facts: Trump is talking about the E. Jean Carroll defamation case, in which the jury ordered Trump to pay Carroll \$83.3 million in damages. Trump’s attorney Alina Habba tried to argue that the U.S. district judge presiding over the case, Lewis Kaplan, faced conflicts of interest, claiming that the judge had once served as a mentor to E. Jean Carroll’s lead attorney, Roberta Kaplan (no relation) when they both worked at the same law firm in the 1990s. After Habba called their relationship “incestuous,” Roberta Kaplan responded in a letter to the court in which she said she had no recollection of interacting with the judge during that period. Habba promptly retracted the accusation and said the matter **had been** “resolved.”

What Trump Said: Biden “is willing to hurt a former President who is very popular, who got 75 million votes. I got more votes than any other sitting president in history.”

The Facts: Trump received 74.2 million votes in the 2020 general election, and Biden received 81.3 million. Given population growth in the U.S., the number of votes cast in the general presidential election usually increases each cycle. In most cases going back to the country's founding, each sitting President has drawn more votes in his re-election bid than any of his predecessors.

Read More: [*Read the Full Transcripts of Donald Trump's Interviews With TIME*](#)

What Trump Said: “It’s a two-tier system. Because when I look at Portland, when I look at Minneapolis, where they took over police precincts and everything else, and went after federal buildings, when I look at other situations that were violent, and where people were killed, nothing happened to them. Nothing happened to them. I think it’s a two-tier system of justice.”

The Facts: Trump is talking about the law enforcement response to Black Lives Matter protests in 2020. A review by The Associated Press found more than 300 federal cases were filed nationwide in connection with 2020 protests; more than 120 people were convicted or pleaded guilty to their charges. Of the roughly 70 people sentenced by Aug. 2021, the average sentence length was 27 months in prison, with at least 10 people receiving sentences of five years or more.

In Portland, Ore., BLM protests stretched on for months and were largely described as peaceful, although some became violent or resulted in property destruction like **arson** or looting. Police arrested nearly 1,000 protestors, and roughly 90% of the charges were eventually dropped. Nearly 70% of the people arrested had been charged with “interfering with a peace officer” and “disorderly conduct,” which in those cases often meant protesting in the street when directed to stop. The U.S. Attorney **also** filed federal charges against dozens of protestors in Portland. Prosecutors ultimately **dropped** 47 of them. Multiple **defendants pleaded guilty** and were sentenced to prison.

One person in Portland was shot and killed during a clash of counter-protestors, and a task force led by federal officials later shot and killed **the suspect** in that homicide.

Some of the most intense reactions to the aftermath of George Floyd's death on May 25, 2020, were in Floyd's city of Minneapolis. Arsonists set more than **150 fires** to structures in the following week. On May 28, rioters surrounded the local precinct of the four officers who would be charged in connection to Floyd's death. Officers and officials abandoned the structure, and demonstrators set the station on fire. Police arrested hundreds, giving **most of the protestors misdemeanor citations** for breaking an imposed curfew. Seventeen people were charged with arson-related crimes, and 16 of them were sentenced to prison for anywhere from two to ten years.

What Trump Said: "And whether you like it or not, nobody died other than Ashli."

The Facts: A bipartisan **Senate report** found that seven people lost their lives in connection to the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol.

Four people in the crowd died, including Ashli Babbitt, who was fatally shot by a Capitol Police officer. Kevin Greeson died of a heart attack, and Benjamin Philips died of a stroke. Rosanne Boyland was crushed by a stampede. A Washington medical examiner determined that Greeson and Philips died from natural causes, and that Boyland's death was caused by an accidental overdose.

In the days and weeks after the attack, three police officers died. Howard S. Liebengood, a Capitol Police officer, and Jeffrey Smith, a Metropolitan police officer, both died by suicide. Capitol Police officer Brian D. Sicknick died on Jan 7, after undergoing multiple strokes in the hours after he confronted the rioters.

What Trump Said: "I'm the one that tried to stop it. I offered 10,000 soldiers and Nancy Pelosi turned me down. So did the mayor of Washington. She turned me down in writing."

The Facts: Trump did not offer 10,000 soldiers to protect the Capitol. He has made **prior false claims** that he ordered the deployment of 10,000 National

Guardsmen on Jan. 6 to control crowds who would attend his rally, and that House Speaker Nancy Pelosi blocked the instruction. According to the official Department of Defense timeline of events associated with Jan. 6, no such order existed. D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser had **previously requested** 340 National Guard troops for that day from the Department of Defense.

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What Trump Said: “I have a lawsuit against Pulitzer Foundation over the Russia, Russia, Russia hoax, because they talked about it for two and a half years and it turned out to be a total scam. And then certain writers got Nobel Prizes.”

The Facts: Trump **filed a defamation lawsuit** against the Pulitzer Prize Board in Dec. 2022 because it had awarded its prestigious National Reporting prize in 2018 jointly to the New York *Times* and Washington *Post* for their reporting on the Trump campaign’s alleged collusion with Russia over the 2016 election. In response, Trump appealed the reward and requested that the Pulitzer board review the choices for factual inaccuracies. Upon completing two independent reviews of the 20 articles, the Pulitzer board **released a statement** declining to revoke the award. Afterwards, Trump sued the Pulitzer board for defamation.

None of the writers involved with the Pulitzer-Prize winning coverage have received Nobel Prizes.

What Trump Said: “We were spending almost 100% of the money on NATO. We were protecting Europe and they weren’t even paying ... Only eight countries were paying. The rest of them were delinquent.”

The Facts: In 2006, NATO members agreed that each country would allot 2% of its Gross National Product to defense spending. The agreement, a defense investment guideline, **ensures the Alliance's collective military readiness**. It is not a bill, but rather a voluntary spending guideline for each country’s military budget. In 2017, four countries were meeting the target, according to NATO

records. By 2020, nine were. In February, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said he “expects 18 Allies to spend 2% of GDP on defense in 2024—a six-fold increase since 2014 when only three Allies met the target.”

What Trump Said: “Biden has the right to close up the border right now. He doesn’t need anything from Congress.”

The Facts: To “close the border,” migrants would have to be banned from claiming asylum. Biden has placed limits on the abilities of migrants to claim asylum in the U.S. The Executive branch, however, does not have legal authority to suspend U.S. asylum law unilaterally.

Unless Congress changes asylum laws, migrants still have the right to claim refuge or request humanitarian assistance. When Trump attempted to ban most asylum seekers, federal courts **struck down** the policy.

What Trump Said: “I believe if we were attacked, NATO wouldn’t be there. Many of the countries in NATO would not be there.”

The Facts: NATO’s collective defense principle stipulates that an attack on a single NATO Ally constitutes an attack on all NATO Allies. As defined in Article 5 of the treaty, all members will take actions to defend or assist the Ally that has been attacked.

Since its adoption in 1949, Article 5 has only been **invoked once**: immediately after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. The other 18 member nations of NATO launched a number of operations in response, including the deployment of air forces to secure the skies over the U.S. and naval anti-terrorism efforts. NATO members also participated in the ensuing ground war in Afghanistan.

What Trump Said: “Secretary Stoltenberg said, and I hope he says it now, but he certainly said it then loud and clear, he has never seen any force like

Trump.”

The Facts: Jens Stoltenberg, the NATO Secretary-General, did not say he had never seen any force like Trump. In a 2019 visit to the White House, Stoltenberg thanked then-President Trump for his “strong leadership and commitment to the Alliance.” More recently, after Trump suggested he wouldn't protect NATO allies that didn't meet payment targets, Stoltenberg said Trump's threats “undermine the credibility of Nato's deterrence.”

What Trump Said: “Some of those people I fired. Bill Barr, I fired Bill Barr.”

The Facts: Former Attorney General Bill Barr submitted his resignation letter to Trump on Dec. 14, 2020. Trump at the time said he accepted the resignation, tweeting: “Our relationship has been a very good one, he has done an outstanding job!” A senior White House official confirmed to The Washington Post that Barr had not been fired.

From a Follow-up Interview on April 27

What Trump Said: I passed the law. I took an old law, brought it into effect that you get a minimum of 10 years without any adjustment if you do anything to desecrate a monument and everything was immediately set up ... everything stopped after that.

The Facts: In June 2020, following the murder of George Floyd, protesters sought to topple many of the Confederate statues across the country. Trump signed an **executive order** directing federal law officials to prosecute individuals who damage monuments, statues, or other federal property. The executive order simply directed the Attorney General to enforce an existing law.

What Trump Said: “We have 40,000 troops, and in a somewhat precarious position.”

The Facts: Trump has complained that the U.S. has 40,000 troops in South Korea, but **the actual number** is 28,500.

What Trump Said: South Korea “paid us billions, many billions of dollars, for us having troops there. From what I’m hearing, they were able to renegotiate with the Biden Administration and bring that number way, way down to what it was before, which was almost nothing.”

The Facts: During his presidency, Trump demanded that South Korea increase its contributions to host U.S. troops in the country. In early 2019, the country’s contribution increased by more than 10%, from \$830 million annually to \$924 million. Trump had requested the country pay as much as **\$5 billion dollars**—a 500% increase and a “non-starter” for South Korea, as Reuters **reported** at the time.

In 2021, the two countries agreed that South Korea would pay \$1 billion that year—a 13.9% increase from its annual payments in 2019 and 2020, with costs increasing by 6.1 percent per year until 2025. The U.S. and South Korea are currently **re-negotiating** a new cost-sharing agreement to begin in 2026.

What Trump Said: “I never said that at all,” when asked about terminating the U.S. Constitution

The Facts: On Dec. 3, 2022, referring to the 2020 election, Trump posted on his Truth Social website: “A Massive Fraud of this type and magnitude allows for the termination of all rules, regulations, and articles, even those found in the Constitution.”

What Trump Said: “The cupboards were bare. We had no gowns, we had no masks. We had no goggles, we had no medicines. We had no ventilators. We had nothing. The cupboards were totally bare.”

The Facts: When Trump came into office, the U.S. Strategic National Stockpile, an integrated collection of secret, federally-controlled warehouses packed with medical and protective equipment, was short on supplies. That's because President Barack Obama deployed resources from the stockpile for public health emergencies such as the swine flu and Ebola crises. When Obama tried to restock the stockpile, Tea Party Republicans **blocked** the new funding. In his first three years as president, Trump never attempted to replenish the equipment. That proved costly once the pandemic struck. By April of 2020, the U.S. government had **already distributed** 90 percent of its supplies.

What Trump Said: "I was very strong on saying that this came from Wuhan. And it came from the Wuhan labs. And I said that from day one."

The Facts: The scientific community and the nation's foremost epidemiologists have yet to form a consensus on the pandemic's origins. While the U.S. Energy Department and the Federal Bureau of Investigation have **each concluded** that COVID-19 most likely arose from a Wuhan lab leak, the nation's top intelligence agencies say it's more likely the outbreak **stemmed** from natural transmission from an animal market. None have reached a definitive conclusion.

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