


INVESTIGATIONS

Trump has threatened dozens of times to use the government to target political enemies

By Rebecca Jacobs May 22, 2024



Illustration by Miru Osuga/CREW

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Donald Trump has repeatedly promised to weaponize the federal government during a second administration by pursuing revenge, retaliation and retribution against his political enemies. Because Trump is posting primarily on Truth Social, his newly-public social media company with only a niche following, the extent of his threats have mostly flown under the radar. Trump's attitude can be summed up in one Truth Social post from August, 2023: "IF YOU GO AFTER ME, I'M COMING AFTER YOU!"

CREW analyzed over 13,000 of Trump’s Truth Social posts from January 1, 2023 to April 1, 2024, and found that while Trump has recently backed off some of his more violent rhetoric, threatening political opponents has been a consistent fixation for Trump. Since the start of last year, Trump has issued direct or implied threats on Truth Social to use the powers of the federal government to target Joe Biden during a second Trump administration 25 times. Specifically, Trump has threatened him with FBI raids, investigations, indictments and even jail time.

But Biden is not Trump’s only target. He’s also threatened or suggested that the FBI and the Department of Justice should take action against senators, judges, members of Biden’s family and even non-governmental organizations.

Trump’s posts should not be taken as empty threats, but rather as a call to action for Congress to put in place meaningful guardrails against the weaponization of the military and federal government’s law enforcement agencies —before it’s too late.



Trump’s threats to Biden range from ominous warnings to specific plans for retribution. Many of these threats revolve around replicating his own legal woes, which he refers to as

the “weaponization” of the DOJ, against Biden. In one post about Special Counsel Jack Smith’s investigation, he warned there will be “repercussions far greater than anything that Biden or his Thugs could understand” and that if the investigations continue, it would open a “Pandora’s Box” of retribution. In another post, Trump wrote that his federal indictments are “setting a BAD precedent for yourself, Joe. The same can happen to you.” In July Trump reposted rally coverage quoting him that “Now the gloves are off.”

Trump has explicitly threatened Biden with a special counsel investigation and indictment. In one post he called on Attorney General Merrick Garland to “immediately end Special Counsel investigation into anything related to me because I did everything right, and appoint a Special Counsel to investigate Joe Biden who hates Biden as much as Jack Smith hates me.” In another he asked “When will Joe Biden be Indicted for his many crimes against our Nation?” Trump has posted about this over and over again, promising to appoint a special prosecutor to investigate Biden, and indict him if Trump returns to the White House for a second term.

Trump’s request for immunity from prosecution for crimes committed while president stands at odds with his threats against Biden if he loses the immunity case. Indeed, Trump has not so subtly hinted at weaponizing this outcome against Biden during a second term, saying that an outgoing president would face almost “certain indictment” immediately from the “opposing party” for the “mistakes and decisions that are destroying our nation,” like “his Open Border Policy,” and that he would “certainly be Prosecuted.”

Trump has “reTruthed” others’ posts about Biden that are even more threatening, and sometimes violent. In June he reposted a clip from Representative Marjorie Taylor Green where she asserted, “Joe Biden shouldn’t just be impeached, he should be handcuffed and hauled out of the White House for his crimes.” Trump posted a screenshot of a different post saying the FBI should “raid all of [Biden’s] residences and seize anything they want, including his passports.”

These plans for a vengeful second term in office are not

indicted. In September, he posted “Senate Democrats should all resign based on Senator Bob Menendez! They all knew what was going on, and the way he lived. Why doesn’t the FBI raid Senate Democrat’s homes like they illegally raided Mar-a-Lago.”

Some posts announced plans for harsh retribution against the specific lawyers, judges, and other officials whom he has blamed for his legal and other troubles. In one instance he reposted a call for Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg to be “put in jail,” and another for New York Attorney General Letitia James and Judge Arthur Engoron to be “PLACED UNDER CITIZENS ARREST.” He has reposted calls for Special Counsel Jack Smith and others to be locked up and “throw away the key.” One reTruth promised to charge Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, Bragg, Smith, Garland and Biden with conspiracy and racketeering.

The threats extend beyond punishing officials for perceived corruption. On three occasions Trump has vowed to prosecute President Obama for official acts he took while in office, like prosecuting him for “capital murder” for two American civilian casualties during a drone strike.

Trump has called for additional prosecutions on the false basis he won the 2020 election. In February 2023 he wrote on Truth Social, commenting on an article about Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg violating Georgia election law, “He cheated on the Election(s). The whole system is RIGGED. Why isn’t he being prosecuted? The Democrats only know how to cheat. America isn’t going to take it much longer!” Last October, Trump ReTruthed a meme showing two election workers that was captioned, “start arresting the poll workers and watch how fast they tell you who told them to cheat.”

In addition to these threats against other high-profile public figures, Trump has also threatened nonprofits for their work. In November he wrote on Truth Social, “For any

radical left charity, non-profit, or so called aid organizations supporting these caravans and illegal aliens, we will prosecute them for their participation in human trafficking, child smuggling, and every other crime we can find.”

Trump is forecasting clearly that a possible second Trump presidency will be sharply focused on revenge, including weaponization of the federal government against political opponents, judges, former presidents and others. That’s a concerning threat to our democracy, but Congress could take several actions now to prevent the worst-case scenario.

What should be done?

As CREW has noted for years, the DOJ and FBI’s impartiality is key to advancing accountability, justice and safety at a time when domestic violent extremism is rising. Congress should pass the Protecting Our Democracy Act (PODA), which would curb abuses of power by presidents of both parties and strengthen Congress’s ability to fulfill its constitutional role as a check on executive branch overreach.

One important part of the PODA is the Security from Political Interference in Justice Act, which would prevent the White House from interfering in the work of law enforcement and the DOJ, including exerting pressure to prosecute the president’s political enemies. PODA passed in the House on a bipartisan basis in December 2021, but most of the bill was never taken up by the Senate.

As Trump repeatedly threatens to use law enforcement against his enemies, Congress should also prepare for the potential that he would attempt to use the military for retribution as well. Congress should reform the Insurrection Act, which could be weaponized by the president to use the military domestically against real or perceived enemies. During his first term in office, Trump reportedly considered invoking the Insurrection Act twice, once during the Black Lives Matter protests and again as part of his efforts to stay in office after losing the 2020 election. Now his allies claim they would invoke the Act on his first day in office.

Currently, the legislation grants the president the power to “take such measures as he considers necessary” to suppress “any insurrection, domestic violence, unlawful combination, or conspiracy.” But without defining the meaning of those terms, it is ripe for abuse. Proposed reforms include defining insurrection, limiting the president’s authority to deploy the military and requiring consultations with governors and oversight by Congress.

As Trump’s Truth Social posts show, now would be a very good time for Congress to act to prevent any president from weaponizing key branches of the federal government against their perceived enemies.

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