

Fraud focus: why is Trump granting clemency to convicted fraudsters?

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Adam Gabbatt

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Donald Trump's mass pardoning of those convicted in connection to the January 6 insurrection raised eyebrows last year, but more recently his pardons have appeared to have a particular focus: to grant clemency to those convicted of fraud.

Since taking office, Trump has pardoned dozens of people convicted of white-collar crimes, including several billionaires, with most of [the 13 pardons](#) he quietly issued this month granting clemency to people convicted of fraud.

Those include Wanda Vázquez Garced, the former governor of Puerto Rico who [pleaded guilty](#) last year to a campaign finance violation. The US Department of Justice said Vázquez took hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from a Venezuelan, Julio Herrera Velutini, and Mark Rossini in exchange for firing a federal official investigating a bank owned by Herrera Velutini.

Trump pardoned Herrera Velutini and Rossini, who were both convicted of wire fraud, along with Vázquez. Herrera Velutini's daughter, Isabel Herrera, donated \$2.5m to the pro-Trump political action committee Maga Inc, and another \$1m in July 2025, CBS News [reported](#). A White House official told CBS News the pardons and donations were unrelated.

Another pardon this month was given to a woman to whom Trump had granted clemency during his first term. Adriana Camberos had a fraud-related sentence commuted by Trump in 2021 after being convicted as part of an elaborate fake 5-hour Energy Drink scheme. In 2024, she and her brother were [convicted in a separate fraud case](#) which involved the pair lying to manufacturers to buy groceries at discount prices, before selling them at a profit.

More than half of Trump's 88 individual pardons – the bulk of those pardoned for the January 6 insurrection were pardoned in a sweeping [presidential proclamation](#) – were for white-collar offenses, “with money laundering, bank fraud and wire fraud among the most frequent crimes the president has wiped clean”, NBC News reported.

The network found that Trump had also pardoned more offenders who owed large fines or restitutions, either to the government or to victims. An [analysis](#) by Democrats on the House judiciary committee found that Trump's pardons have deprived “victims and survivors of crime” of \$1.3bn in restitution and fines.

“Our analysis shows that Trump's criminal pardon spree is, in addition to everything else, an astonishing giveaway to lawbreakers to keep the money they stole from their employees, their investors, and all the American taxpayers. Whoever said crime doesn't pay has certainly not studied the [Trump administration](#),” said Democrat Jamie Raskin, the ranking member of the House judiciary committee.

The fraud pardons come at a time when Republicans are, theoretically, laser-focused on investigating fraud. Federal prosecutors [allege](#) as much as \$9bn has been stolen across Minnesota in schemes allegedly linked to the state's Somali population, and Trump has accused other Democratic-run states of fraud.

In early January, Trump used unproven allegations of widespread fraud to [cut more than \\$10bn](#) in childcare and social services payments from California, Illinois, New York, Minnesota and Colorado, each of which is run by Democrats. The effort [has been blocked](#) by two federal judges, allowing funds to continue to flow to states.

Earlier this month, Trump [claimed](#) he had begun a “fraud investigation of California”, without offering further information.

Yet it is hard to tally this apparent effort to root out fraud with Trump's treatment of other corruption cases. In June, the president commuted the sentence of Lawrence Duran, who was sentenced to 50 years in prison [in 2011](#) for his role in a \$200m Medicare fraud scheme.

The White House said in a statement: “When it comes to pardons, the White House takes them with the utmost seriousness and the president understands the responsibility that he has as president to issue pardons to individuals who are seeking that.”

It added: “That's why we have a very thorough review process here that moves with the Department of Justice and the White House counsel's office. There's a whole team of qualified lawyers who look at every single pardon request that ultimately make their way up to the president of the United States. He's the ultimate, final decision maker. And he was very clear when he came into office that he was most interested in looking at pardoning individuals who were abused and used by the Biden Department of Justice, and were over prosecuted by a weaponized DoJ.”

The contradiction has not gone unnoticed in the Democratic party. Gavin Newsom, the governor of California and a key Trump antagonist, this week [launched a section of the governor's website](#) that Newsom said would track "President Trump's pattern of pardoning convicted fraudsters and corrupt insiders".

"Donald Trump is the personification of fraud. His hypocrisy knows no bounds: he is pardoning people convicted of fraud, corruption, and abusing the public trust – while turning around and using 'fraud' as a launching pad to go after political rivals," Newsom said in a statement.

"While his administration hands out get-out-of-jail-free cards to real fraudsters, the federal government is now trying to intimidate and target California with baseless allegations of 'massive fraud'. The rule of law isn't a political weapon – it's a promise, and we won't let it be twisted to settle scores."