

# Exclusive: Judges face rise in threats as Musk blasts them over rulings



Item 1 of 2 A person rides an electric unicycle while pulling a wagon loaded with packages, in front of the Eastern District of New York Court Federal Court House in New York City, U.S., February 5, 2025. REUTERS/David 'Dee' Delgado/File Photo

[1/2]A person rides an electric unicycle while pulling a wagon loaded with packages, in front of the Eastern District of New York Court Federal Court House in New York City, U.S., February 5, 2025. REUTERS/David 'Dee' Delgado/File Photo [Purchase Licensing Rights, opens new tab](#)

- Summary
- Musk's social media posts criticize judges, calling them "corrupt" and "radical"
- Judges report increased threats, U.S. Marshals warn of high threat levels
- Legal experts warn attacks on judges threaten judicial independence

WASHINGTON, March 5 (Reuters) - U.S. Marshals have warned federal judges of unusually high threat levels as tech billionaire Elon Musk and other Trump administration allies ramp up efforts to discredit judges who stand in the way of White House efforts to slash federal jobs and programs, said several judges with knowledge of the warnings.

In recent weeks, Musk, congressional Republicans and other top allies of U.S. President Donald Trump have [called for the impeachment](#) of some federal judges or attacked their integrity in response to court rulings that have slowed the Trump administration's moves to dismantle entire government agencies and fire tens of thousands of workers.

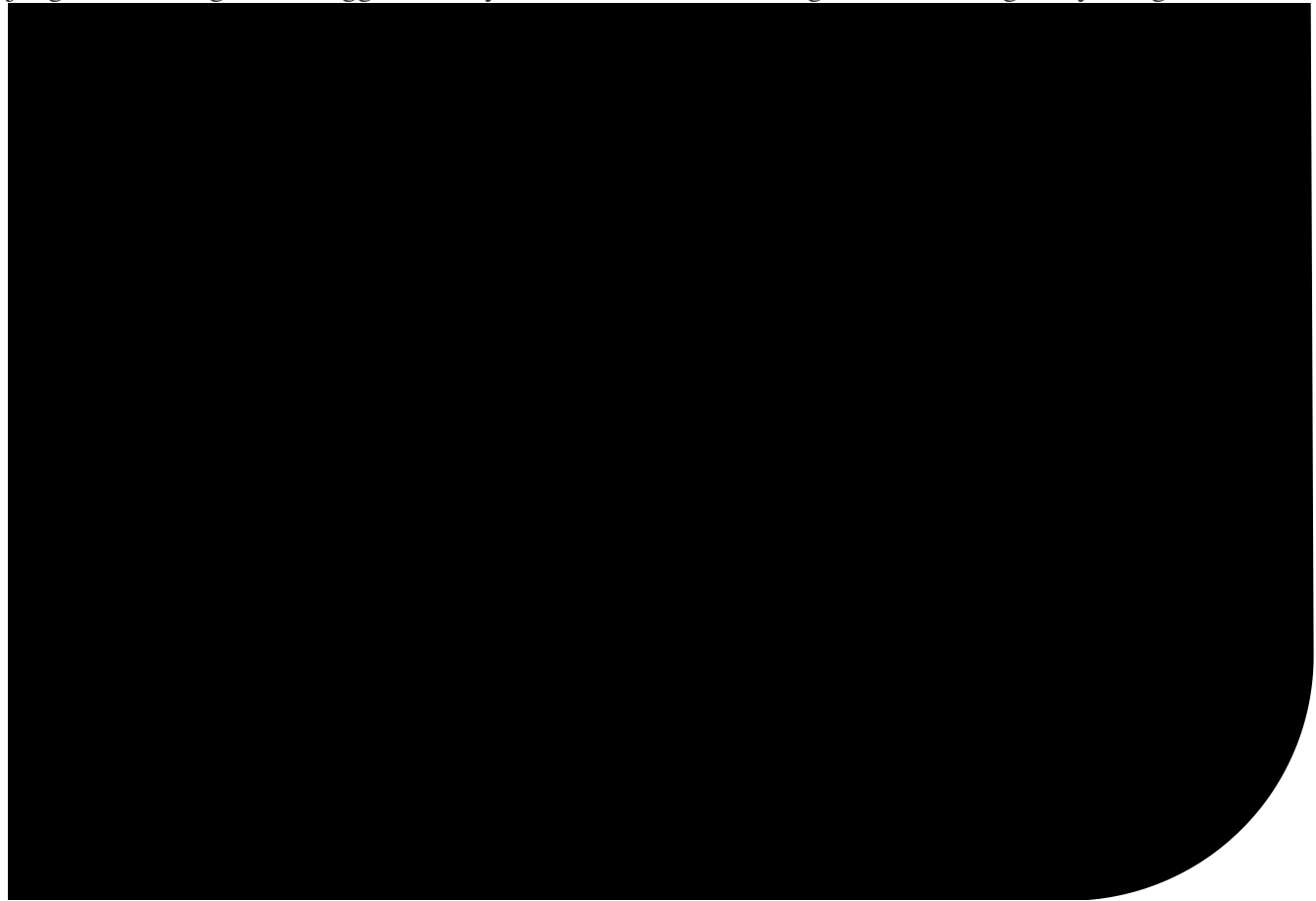
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Musk, the world's richest person, has lambasted judges in more than 30 posts since the end of January on his social media site X, calling them “corrupt,” “radical,” “evil” and deriding the "TYRANNY of the JUDICIARY" after judges blocked parts of the federal downsizing that he’s led. The Tesla CEO has also reposted nearly two dozen tweets by others attacking judges.

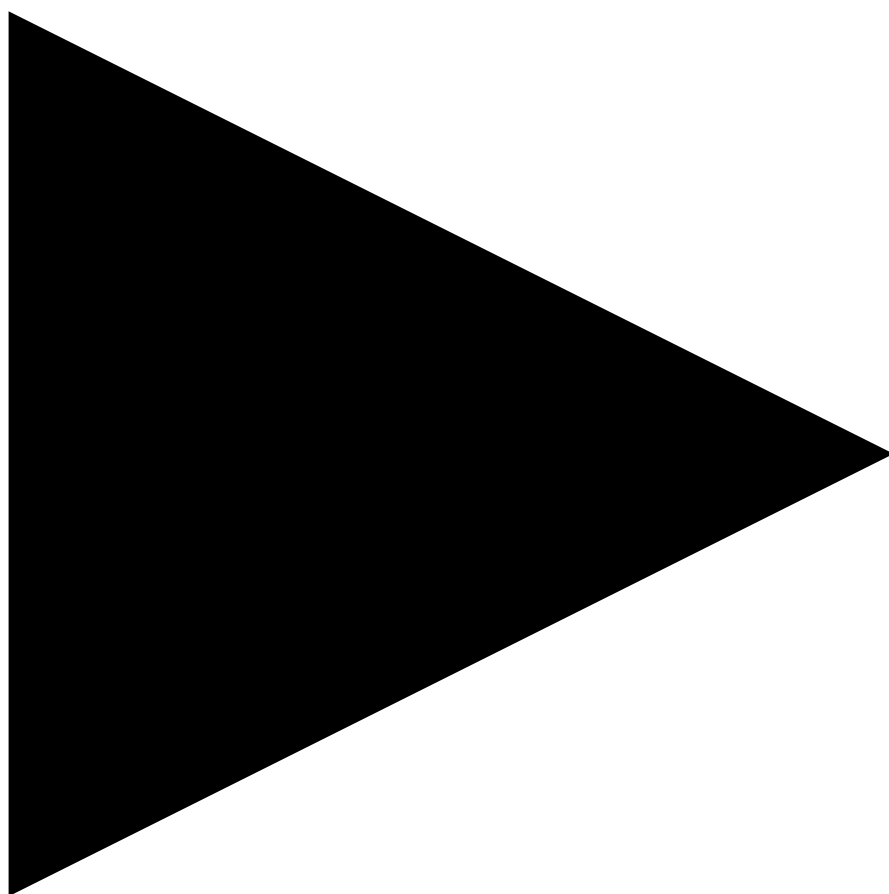
Reuters interviews with 11 federal judges in multiple districts revealed mounting alarm over their physical security and, in some cases, a rise in violent threats in recent weeks. Most spoke on condition of anonymity and said they did not want to further inflame the situation or make comments that could be interpreted as conflicting with their duties of impartiality. The Marshals Service declined to comment on security matters.

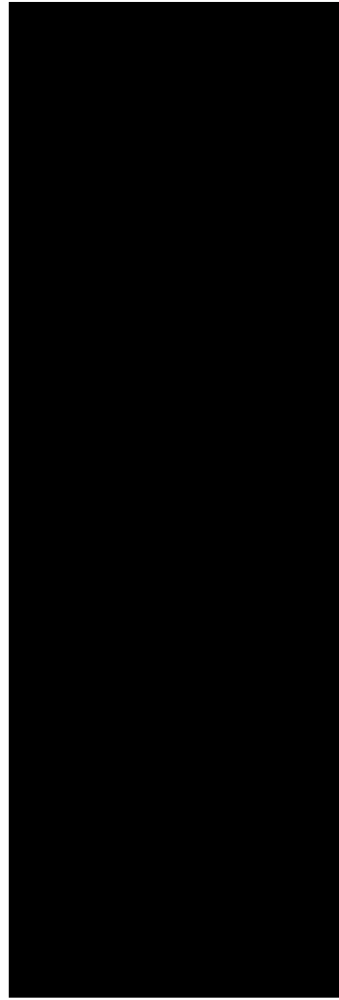
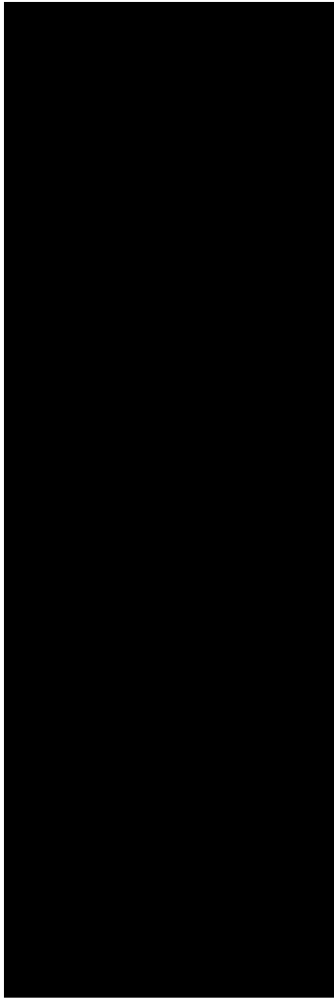
As [Reuters documented](#) in a series of stories last year, political pressure on federal judges and violent threats against them have been rising since the 2020 presidential election, when federal courts heard a series of highly politicized cases, including failed lawsuits filed by Trump and his backers seeking to overturn his loss. Recent rhetorical attacks on judges and the rise in threats jeopardize the judicial independence that underpins America’s democratic constitutional order, say legal experts.

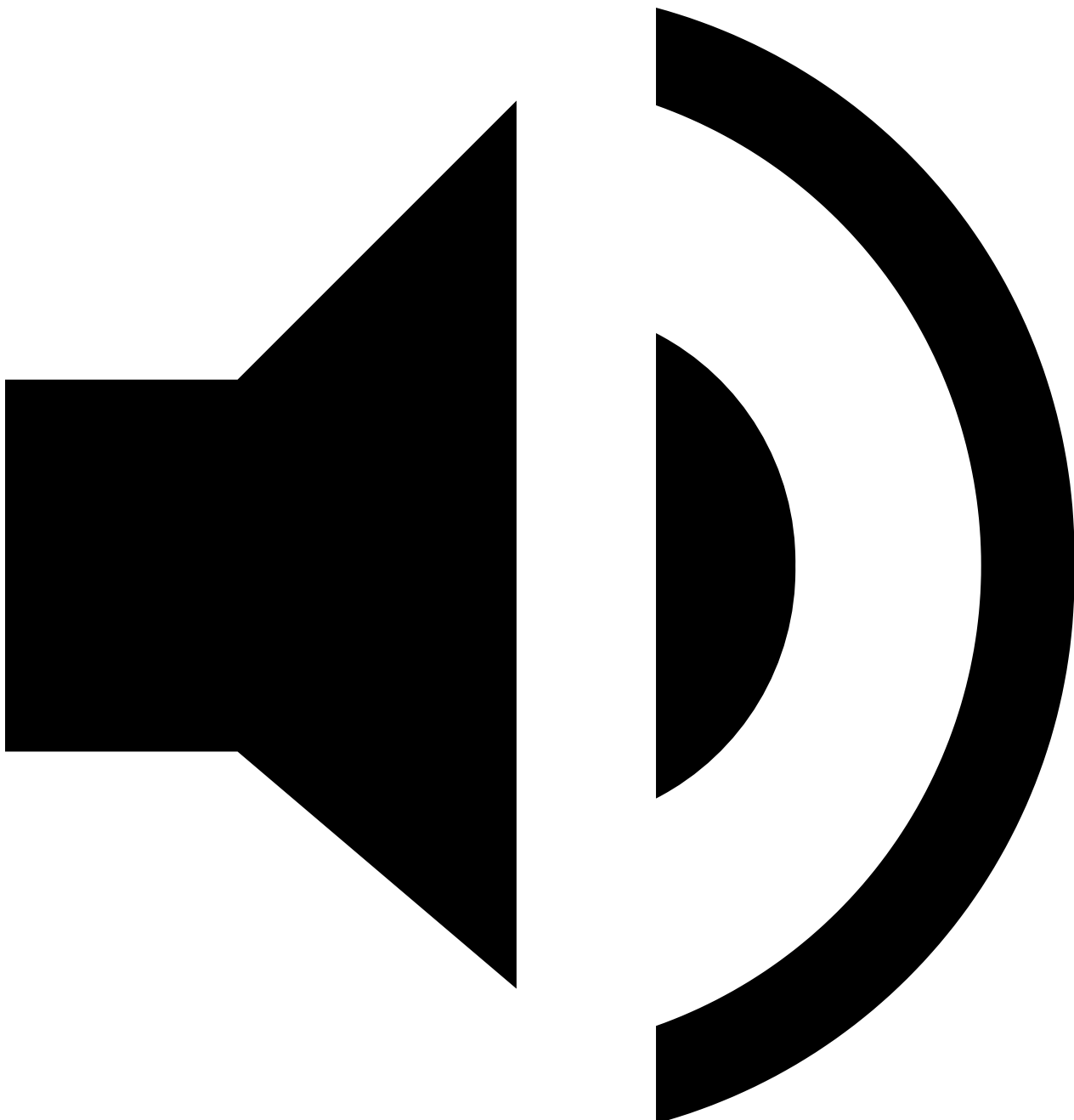
U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, [in his annual year-end report](#) in December, warned about a rising number of threats to the judiciary's independence, including calls for violence against judges and "dangerous" suggestions by elected officials to disregard court rulings they disagree with.

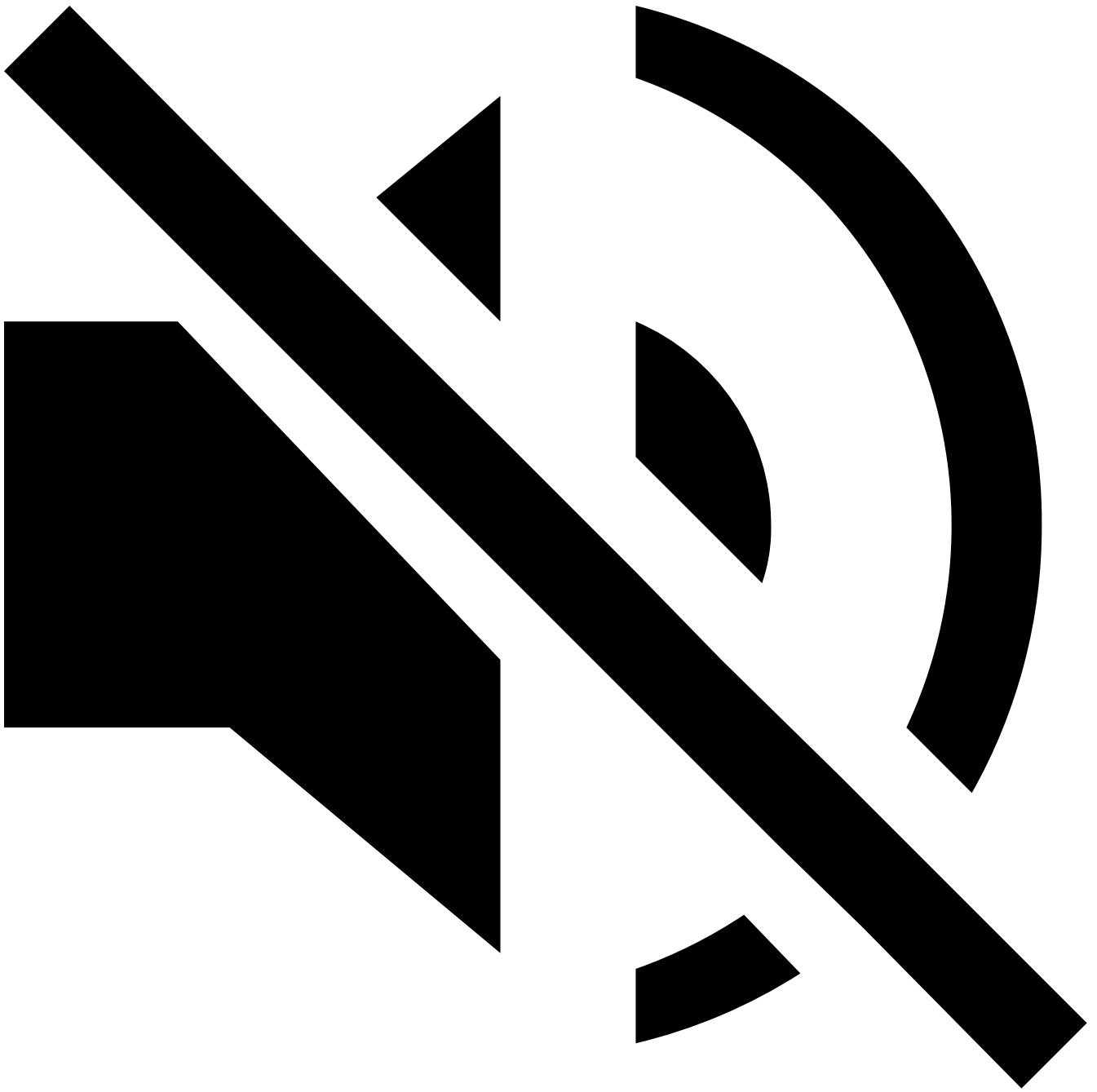


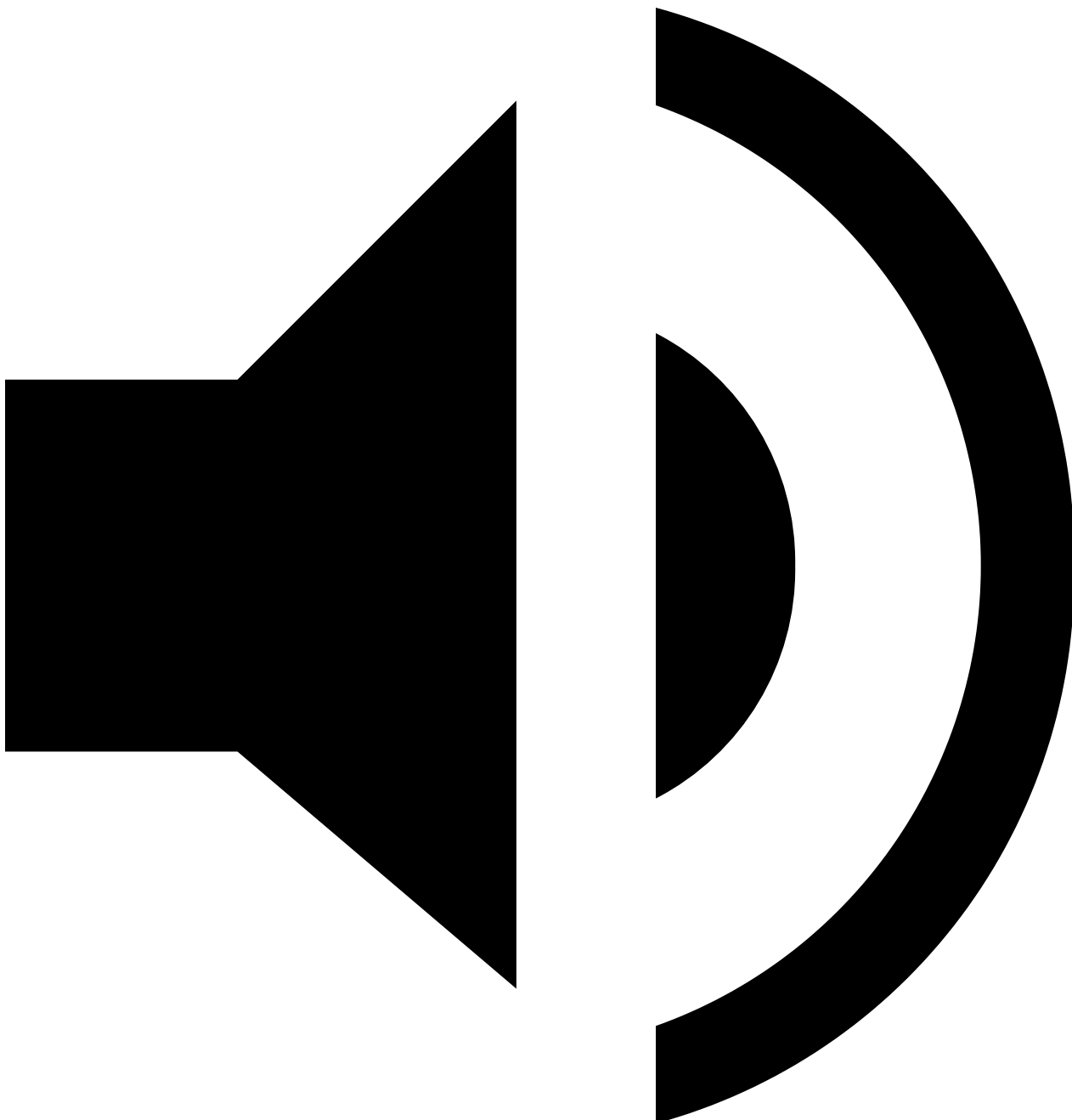
1/100:22Defense, sanctions discussed with Trump in Vatican: Zelenskiy

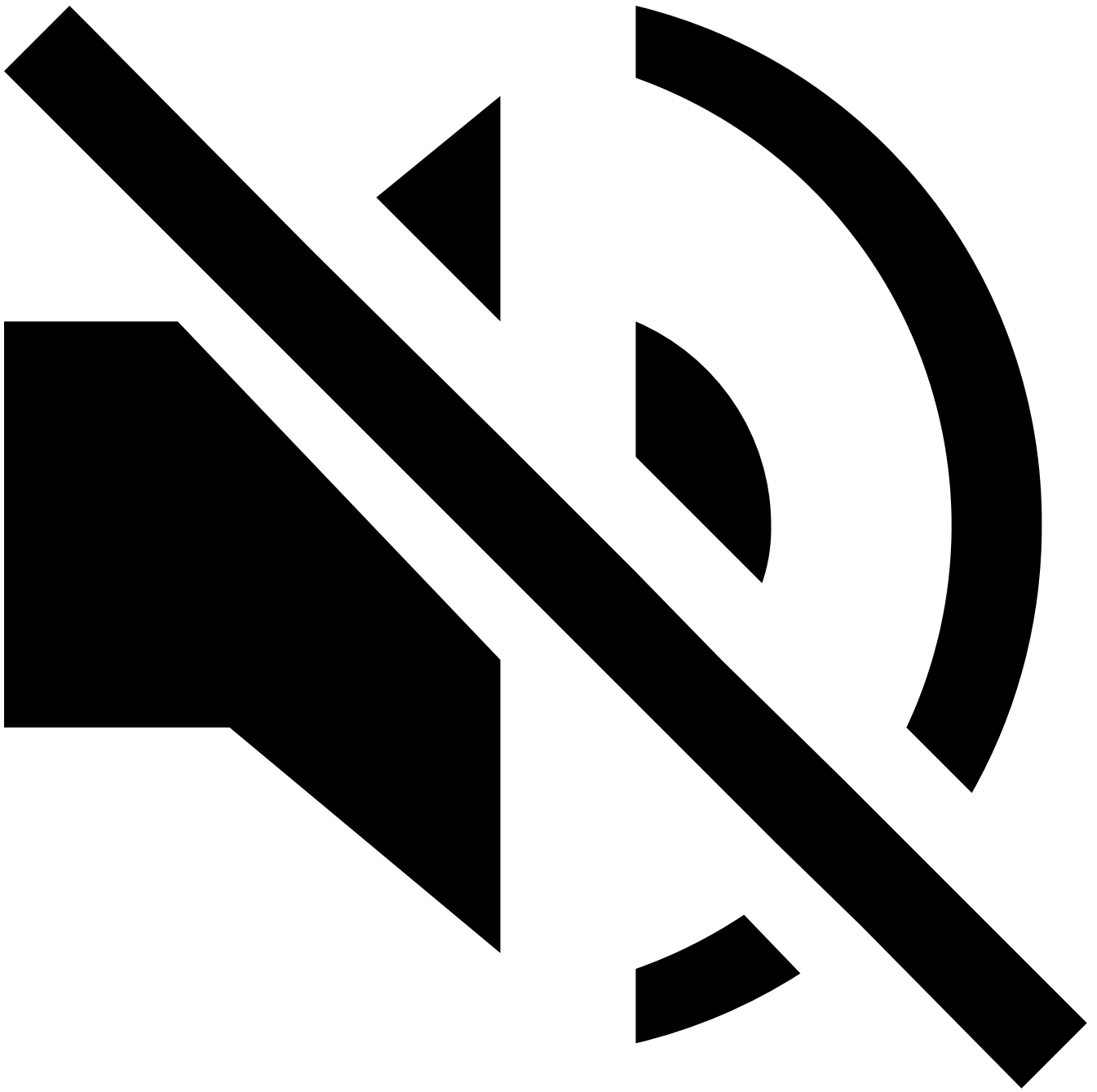




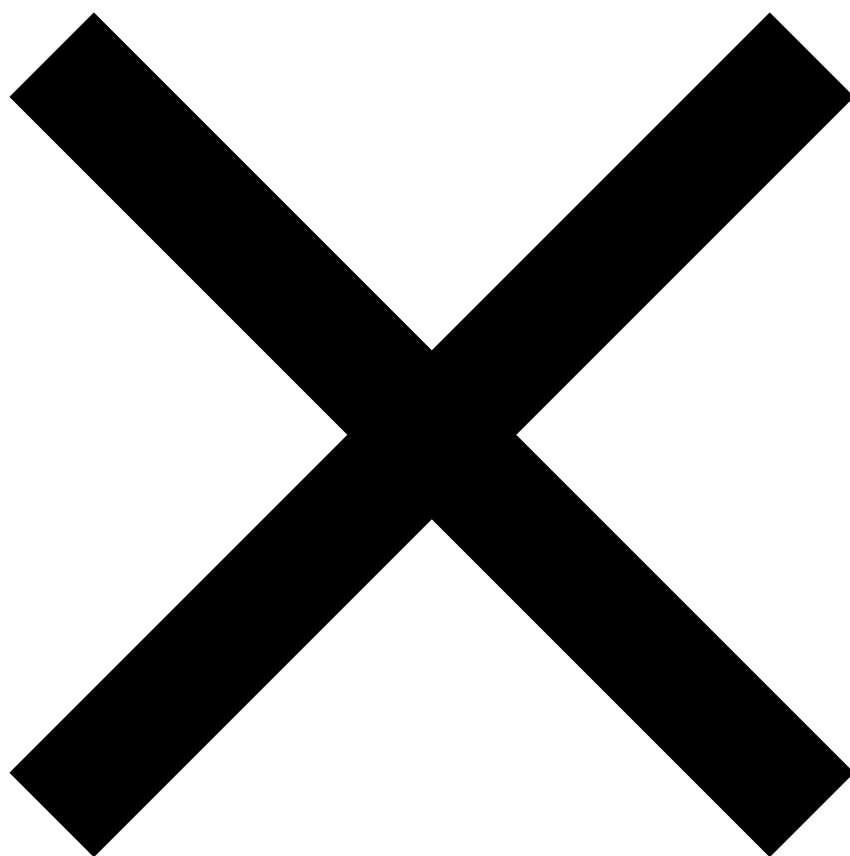












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On social media, Musk and Republican lawmakers have described judges as threats to democracy, turning the role of the federal judiciary -- a branch of government created to check executive and congressional power -- on its head. "The only way to restore rule of the people in America is to impeach judges," Musk wrote in one post. "No one is above the law, including judges." Musk did not respond to a request for comment about his wave of criticism against the judiciary. Several judges said the U.S. Marshals Service, which provides judicial security, has informed them of a heightened threat environment over the past several weeks, either verbally or in writing. The Marshals also discussed security measures, the judges said, including regular searches for threatening posts online.

Two New York federal judges -- U.S. District Judges Paul Engelmayer and Jeannette Vargas -- are receiving extra security [after their rulings](#) blocked staff from the Musk-driven Department of Government Efficiency from accessing sensitive Treasury Department data, according to a person with knowledge of the matter. Engelmayer and Vargas did not respond to requests for comment.

Another person familiar with the judicial security environment said several federal judges in the Washington D.C. area had received pizzas sent anonymously to their homes, which is being interpreted by law enforcement as a form of intimidation meant to convey that a target's address is known.

"I've never seen judges as uneasy as they are now," said John Jones III, a former U.S. district judge in Pennsylvania appointed by former Republican President George W. Bush in 2002.

Jones, who also served on the security committee of the federal judiciary's policymaking arm, said judges are now grappling with being identified by name in viral social media posts criticizing their integrity and demanding their impeachment. He said he has spoken to about a dozen current judges who expressed safety concerns for themselves and their families.

"The consequences are, quite starkly, that we're going to get a judge killed if we're not careful," said Jones.

Federal courts are hearing more than 100 lawsuits challenging the administration's initiatives, many of them focused on efforts driven by Musk and his team at DOGE to purge hundreds of thousands of federal employees and dramatically scale back government aid and regulatory programs.

Trump and his White House press secretary [also have criticized](#) judges they describe as activists who have issued orders that slowed or blocked some of those efforts.

Asked about Musk's comments, White House spokesperson Harrison Fields said that Musk was speaking in his personal capacity and that the White House has taken no position on whether judges should be impeached. He said "threats against judges are unacceptable, and the president condemns

such actions," and that appropriate law enforcement agencies that are tasked with surveilling such threats are doing so.

"The White House condemns any threats to really any public officials, despite our feelings that a lot of these people are leftist, crazy judges that aren't following the Constitution," Fields said. "Just because these people are leftist, crazy, unconstitutional people doesn't mean they deserve to be harmed. That's not how you engage with disputes in this country."

## “WE HAVE TO BE CAREFUL”

When U.S. District Judge Amir Ali [ruled on February 25](#) that the Trump administration must resume U.S. foreign aid payments that Trump had halted, Musk and other allies of the president called for the judge's removal.

“When judges egregiously undermine the democratic will of the people, they must be fired,” Musk posted on X.

In response to that post, some of Musk's followers on X said the judge should be arrested for treason or deported. One suggested “US patriots fire upon him.” Some assailed his Muslim heritage and questioned his patriotism, including one who falsely asserted Ali had ties to Muslim militant groups.

After an earlier February ruling by Ali in the same case, an X user called for him to be beheaded.

Another questioned “why so few judges are hanged.” One posted a picture of a noose.

Ali didn't respond to a request for comment on the threats against him.

“The chatter among judges is we have to be careful,” one federal judge said in an interview. Judges overseeing Trump cases receive widespread media coverage, heightening security concerns when their decisions prove controversial, the judge said.

Several judges described threatening phone calls promising personal harm.

The American Bar Association [issued a statement on Monday](#) denouncing the ongoing wave of verbal assaults and threats against judges. The Federal Judges Association said in a statement to its 1,100 members late on Tuesday that “continued violence, intimidation and defiance directed at judges simply because they are fulfilling their sworn judicial duties” risked “the collapse of the rule of law.”

Threats against judges have climbed sharply since Trump ramped up his criticism of the judiciary after he lost the 2020 election. In that time, serious [threats against federal judges](#) more than doubled, from 220 in 2020 to 457 in 2023. Last year, Reuters documented how Trump's attacks on judges who rule against his interests [often lead to waves of threats](#) against them.

Calls for impeachment of judges have added a new wrinkle to the hostility some judges face.

Republicans in Congress have introduced impeachment articles against three judges, including Ali, who have ruled against Trump's executive orders.

Americans have called for impeaching judges before, including failed efforts against Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren after he delivered a landmark opinion in 1954 outlawing racial segregation in public schools. But impeachment is historically rare. It's typically reserved for gross misconduct and never intended as a weapon against judges who issue an unpopular ruling, said judges and legal scholars.

Convicting judges on articles of impeachment requires a two-thirds vote of the U.S. Senate, where Republicans hold only a slim majority.

The vitriolic rhetoric has given pause to members of the judiciary who have been touched firsthand by violence. U.S. District Judge Esther Salas, whose son was killed when a would-be assassin showed up at her home in 2020, warned of the consequences of stoking public rage against judges.

“It really is dangerous to use disparaging words because it leads to death, as in my case,” Salas said in an interview. “It leads to the ratcheting up of already very high emotion. And you know I'm living proof.”

(This story has been refiled to add a full stop after 'face' in paragraph 28)

Spector and Parker reported from New York. Raymond reported from Boston. Additional reporting by Joseph Tanfani. Editing by Jason Szep

