

# These judges ruled against Trump. Then their families came under attack.



After U.S. judges ruled against the Trump administration, some of their family members faced threats and harassment. REUTERS/Carlo Allegri

As federal judges rule against the Trump administration in dozens of politically charged cases, the families of at least 11 of the jurists have been targeted with threats and harassment.

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*Note: This story contains offensive language.*

When U.S. District Judge James Boasberg ruled in April that Trump administration officials could face criminal contempt charges for deporting migrants in defiance of a court order, the blowback was immediate.



**Elon Musk** @elonmusk · Mar 28



Concerning



**@amuse** @amuse · Mar 28

LAWFARE: Judge Boasberg—the activist judge actively obstructing Trump’s agenda—has a daughter whose NGO offers legal aid to illegal immigrants, including members of MS-13 and the TdA gang. The NGO is indirectly funded by taxpayers through USAID grants.

When Elon Musk shared an online post that mischaracterized the work of Judge Boasberg’s daughter, some of his followers responded on X with calls “to lock her up.”

The president’s supporters unleashed a wave of threats and menacing posts. And they didn’t just target the judge. Some attacked Boasberg’s brother. Others blasted his daughter. Some demanded the family’s arrest – or execution.

U.S. District Judge John McConnell’s family endured similar threats after he ruled that President Donald Trump overstepped his authority in freezing grants for education and other services. Far-right provocateur Laura Loomer tweeted a photo of the judge’s daughter, who had worked at the U.S. Education Department as a policy advisor, and accused McConnell of protecting her paycheck. Billionaire Elon Musk amplified the post to his 219 million X followers. Neither mentioned the daughter had left her job before Trump’s inauguration.

Loomer continued her attacks with nine more posts in the ensuing days – and more than 600 calls and emails flooded McConnell’s Rhode Island courthouse, including death threats and menacing messages taunting his family, according to a court clerk and another person familiar with the communications.

After U.S. District Judge James Boasberg ruled against the Trump administration, the president’s supporters responded with vitriol aimed not only at him, but also at his family. via U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia

Boasberg and McConnell are among at least 11 federal judges whose families have faced threats of violence or harassment after they ruled against the new Trump administration, a Reuters investigation found.

The broadsides are part of an intimidation campaign directed at federal judges who have stood in the way of Trump’s moves to dramatically expand presidential authority and slash the federal bureaucracy. As Trump and his allies call for judges to be impeached or attack them as “radical left” political foes, the families of judges are being singled out for harassment.

Since Trump returned to power in January, at least 60 judges or appeals courts have slowed or blocked some of his administration’s initiatives. Reuters spoke with a dozen federal judges who raised concerns about the security of their own families or of the relatives of colleagues handling Trump-related cases. They included jurists appointed by both Republican and Democratic presidents. Most requested anonymity, citing the potential for further inflaming security fears or raising questions about their impartiality. Additional information was gleaned from legal records and interviews with half a dozen officials involved in court security.

Threats against judges and their families “are ultimately threats to constitutional government. It’s as simple as that,” U.S. Circuit Judge Richard Sullivan, who chairs a security committee for the federal judiciary’s policymaking arm, said in an interview.

An excerpt from an email sent in March to a federal judge who ruled against the Trump administration.

The judiciary has emerged as a powerful constraint on a range of Trump's initiatives, from dismantling government agencies to deporting migrants and targeting law firms. As Trump's White House threatens to defy some court orders, legal scholars warn the country may already be in a constitutional crisis. The White House has said judges are the ones overreaching, not the president, but that threats against the judiciary are "unacceptable."

"No one takes security threats more seriously than President Trump – a leader who survived not [one](#), but [two](#) assassination attempts," White House spokesperson Harrison Fields said in response to questions for this story. "The safety of every American is his top priority, and anyone who endangers that safety will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

Reuters identified more than 600 posts on social media and right-leaning message boards since February targeting family members of judges who ruled against the Trump administration. The commentators attacked everything from their physical appearance to their patriotism. Amplified on X and other platforms by some of Trump's most prominent allies, including Musk, those posts have been viewed more than 200 million times. At least 70 posts explicitly called for judges' family members to face violence, retaliation or arrest.

An email sent to a federal judge who ruled against the Trump administration in March.

Other threats or menacing messages were made directly in calls and emails to the courts or the homes of judges and their relatives, according to court records and interviews with U.S. officials involved in judicial security.

Some of the intimidation comes in a novel form: Pizzas are being sent anonymously to the homes of judges and their relatives, which authorities view as a we-know-where-you-live warning.

Facing more than 200 lawsuits challenging the legality of his initiatives, Trump and his allies have blasted judges as "crooked," "conflicted" and "rogue," among other derisive terms. "We cannot allow a handful of communist radical left judges to obstruct the enforcement of our laws and assume the duties that belong solely to the president of the United States," Trump told a rally on Tuesday.

In March, Trump [called for a judge to be impeached](#), drawing a rebuke from Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts. Judges and legal experts say such attacks jeopardize the judicial independence that underpins America's democratic constitutional order and could inspire violence.

"The attacks are not random. They seem designed to intimidate those of us who serve in this critical capacity," U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson said on Thursday at a conference of judges in Puerto Rico. "The threats and harassment are attacks on our democracy."

Reuters examined hundreds of posts and comments reaching millions of people across nearly a dozen online platforms, including Musk-owned X and far-right websites such as Gateway Pundit and Patriots.win. The review identified calls for at least 51 federal judges to be fired, arrested or killed. All of those judges handled cases involving the new Trump administration. The posts and comments often echoed Trump's language, describing the judges as "radical," "leftist" or "activist."

The U.S. Marshals Service, which protects federal judges, declined to comment on threats against the judiciary.

The Judicial Conference of the United States, the policymaking arm of the federal courts, requested an increase in funding for security in [an April 10 letter to U.S. lawmakers](#), citing "escalating" threats against judges and concern over "the impact of hiring freezes and staffing losses" in the Marshals Service.

At a U.S. Senate confirmation hearing on Wednesday, Trump's nominee to lead the Marshals, Gadyaces Serralta, was asked what would happen if Trump ordered the Marshals to halt security for a judge. Serralta said he didn't believe that would happen and vowed to "continue to keep all our judges safe" if he was confirmed.

Current and former jurists said the maelstrom engulfing judges' family members is particularly alarming, pointing to colleagues on the bench who have lost loved ones to violence. A disgruntled litigant killed the mother and husband of U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkow in her Chicago home two decades ago. U.S. District Judge Esther Salas' son was killed when a would-be assassin showed up at her New Jersey home in 2020.



“To be concerned about family members, it’s not theoretical. It’s happened,” David Levi, a former federal judge in Sacramento appointed by former Republican President George H.W. Bush, said in an interview. “I don’t think that most judges thought they were taking on risk to their families when they accepted the job. Not in the way we are experiencing right now.”

The attacks on judges’ relatives are part of a pattern of harassment and intimidation that Trump and his allies have used to cement their [political power](#), silence critics and [pressure the judiciary](#). In a remarkable admission, longtime Republican Senator [Lisa Murkowski](#) of Alaska said last month the threat of political retaliation by Trump has made lawmakers “afraid” to criticize the administration’s policies.

Readers of Gateway Pundit, a far-right news site, have posted threatening and harassing comments about the relatives of federal judges.

## ‘DEPORT THE WHOLE FAMILY’

Many of the online posts targeting judges’ family members have been amplified on X by Musk, the world’s richest person, who has led Trump’s efforts to downsize the federal civil service.

On February 12, the Tesla CEO lambasted U.S. District Judge John Bates, a day after the judge ordered the administration to restore public health websites that were taken down because of transgender references.

Musk shared posts on X with photos of Bates and his wife, which alleged she ran a charity that received U.S. foreign aid – money the Trump administration aimed to cut – and accused the judge of a conflict of interest. In fact, her charity, which assisted Ethiopian orphans, never received U.S. government funds, according to federal data. In one Musk post, he baselessly accused the judge, an appointee of Republican former President George W. Bush, of corruption.

One commenter responded to Musk’s post with a call for the couple to face “capital punishment.”

Another posted an image of a noose and said it was needed to address “the unfathomable level of corruption and tyranny.”

The judge’s chambers received angry and threatening calls after his ruling, according to a court official familiar with the matter.

Laura Loomer, a pro-Trump activist, has singled out judges’ relatives for attention, publicizing their photos and professional information. REUTERS/Eduardo Munoz

Some of Musk’s attacks on judges’ families have drawn heavily on claims advanced by Laura Loomer, a conspiracy theorist and vocal Trump defender. Musk and Loomer have aimed particularly aggressive attacks at the daughter of U.S. District Judge Boasberg.

In March, Boasberg temporarily blocked the Trump administration’s use of a rarely invoked 18th-century law to deport migrants to El Salvador based on unproven claims that they belonged to a Venezuelan criminal gang. The order directed that the operation be paused pending a hearing.

Far-right influencer Laura Loomer has repeatedly disparaged the family members of judges who rule against the interests of U.S. President Donald Trump.

Both Loomer and Musk shared on X a college graduation photo of Boasberg’s daughter, pulled from the internet. Loomer mischaracterized her work at a nonprofit, accusing her of helping illegal immigrant gang members. The organization partners with public defenders to offer social services to people facing low-level criminal charges, including immigrants.

Musk called the daughter’s work “concerning” in a March 28 post on X that has been viewed 42 million times. Commenters demanded that Boasberg and his daughter be punished.

“Arrest him, his daughter and everyone else involved in these devious activities!” one wrote. “Deport the whole family,” another added.

Loomer had shared the photo of Boasberg’s daughter 11 days earlier on X. “Let’s dox Boasberg and his daughter,” a follower responded, referring to a method of revealing a person’s address or other personal

identifying details.

On April 16, Boasberg ruled that he had found probable cause to hold the Trump administration in criminal contempt for violating his order to turn around planes carrying deportees to an El Salvador prison. His daughter quickly faced more harassment.

One commenter on the pro-Trump website Gateway Pundit wrote Boasberg's daughter "needs to be introduced to some prominent MS13 leaders," referring to a notorious El Salvadoran criminal gang. Another called for executions for the Boasberg family: "Start building the gallows." Jim Hoft, the Gateway Pundit's editor, said such offensive material amounts to a tiny fraction of readers' posts, and the company was working to remove the comments identified by Reuters.

All told, Reuters identified about 370 online posts vilifying Boasberg and his daughter, including 228 on X that were viewed more than 119 million times. The nonprofit his daughter works for has removed information about her from its website.

Loomer also went after Boasberg's brother, Thomas, a former Denver schools' superintendent.

In 2017, during Trump's first term, Thomas Boasberg and Denver's Board of Education, like many jurisdictions across the U.S., said it was limiting cooperation with federal immigration authorities after Trump vowed crackdowns on people in the U.S. illegally. The Denver school system said at the time that its position was consistent with existing policy aimed at ensuring "students' learning environments are not disrupted by immigration enforcement."

On X, Loomer mischaracterized Thomas Boasberg's position, asserting without evidence that he said he would "never enforce immigration laws" and that "the Boasberg family has a history of protecting illegal aliens." Multiple commenters accused Judge Boasberg of "treason" or called for his arrest. One posted a photo of his brother.

Loomer and Musk did not respond to requests for comment for this report.

The Marshals said they assigned a security detail to Boasberg in March. The extra security was taken after the judge and his family faced multiple threats, said an official familiar with the matter.

Current and former Marshals told Reuters that when a judge is threatened, Marshals have protected immediate family, such as escorting a child to school. But guarding adult children or other relatives who live independently poses more problems, said Jon Trainum, who spent nearly three decades at the Marshals Service and led its protection operations for five years before retiring in 2021.

He said he's never seen anything like today's harassment of judges' relatives. "It's going to pose a significant challenge to the Marshals," he said, because the agency isn't staffed sufficiently and likely would need to reassign agents from other roles. "I'd be shocked if it's not something being discussed at headquarters right now," he said. The Marshals Service declined to comment on whether such talks are under way.

Video: U.S. judges and their families face growing threats and harassment. Note: This video contains offensive language.

## CHILLING EFFECT

Judges have long faced threats and harassment from angry litigants or convicts they've sentenced. But today's politically charged cases generate rage from huge swaths of people who can fire off a menacing email or post in seconds.

One consequence could be a reluctance of qualified candidates to serve on the bench, said Paul Grimm, a Duke University law professor and former U.S. district judge in Maryland appointed by Democratic ex-President Barack Obama.

No judge should worry "that their families would be called into danger," Grimm said. "It is never justified."

Some family members have taken security precautions, such as going out less or altering travel patterns, people familiar with those changes said.

For judges whose relatives have been targeted – and for the family members who have faced the Trump camp's wrath – the experience can be terrifying.

One judge's relative hounded by Trump supporters in a high-profile case told Reuters she dismissed the initial online posts suggesting she had influenced the judge's rulings. But she said the threats and rage grew exponentially and quickly overwhelmed her.

People sent her private social media messages laced with threats. One promised to drive to her home “to beat your fuckin eyes plum shut,” then put “a fucking bounty” on the judge and “beat him down bad.” Another described her and the judge as “scum” and wrote, “you are in line to meet your maker” – next to a picture of a man gripping an assault rifle.

*We signed up for this when we took the job, but they didn't. That's the unfairness of this.*

*U.S. District Judge John Coughenour*

She cut back on socializing and avoided meeting new people. She scoured the internet for pictures and information about herself that could be weaponized, always wondering, “what’s the next thing they are going to twist and manipulate?” She began worrying for her safety, watching for strange cars on her block and thinking of ways to mask her identity in public.

Reuters agreed not to identify the woman and the judge due to her safety concerns and ongoing harassment.

U.S. District Judge John Coughenour in Seattle said he worries constantly about drawing his family into the fray of politically charged cases.

Coughenour endured a bomb threat at his home after he ruled in January that Trump’s executive order curtailing U.S. birthright citizenship was “blatantly unconstitutional.” He also was the victim of a “swatting” incident in which police rushed to his home after someone called in a fake report that he had killed his wife, according to the judge and a police report.

His wife, who was home at the time, “was very upset,” he said. He was more worried for her well-being than his own, he said, echoing other judges who spoke with Reuters about threats to family. “We signed up for this when we took the job, but they didn’t. That’s the unfairness of this.”

A police incident report details the bomb threat and swatting incident that targeted U.S. District Judge John Coughenour.

## **‘WE’RE ALL TERRIFIED’**

The hostility facing federal judges now is unprecedented.

Threats directed at the judiciary jumped from 179 in 2019, about midway through Trump’s first term, to 457 in 2023, according to the Marshals Service. Though the overall number dipped last year, to 364, the Marshals nevertheless noted in their latest annual report that the “intensity” of those threats has “increased.”

Trump has criticized judges more directly – and in more personal terms – than any prior president. That pattern began during his first campaign in 2016, when he claimed a judge hearing a case against his now-defunct Trump University disliked him because the jurist was of Mexican heritage and Trump had denigrated Mexican immigrants.

In his first term, Trump continued to deride judges who ruled against his interests. Later, he fiercely criticized judges who blocked his efforts to overturn the 2020 election.

Democratic politicians have been more restrained, but U.S. Senator Chuck Schumer drew widespread criticism – including a rebuke from Chief Justice Roberts – when he warned at a 2020 rally that Supreme Court Justices Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch would “pay the price” if they ruled in favor of abortion restrictions. Schumer expressed regret for the remark the next day.

Two years later, after the court overturned the nationwide right to an abortion and a California man was charged with planning to kill Kavanaugh, Republican politicians recirculated Schumer’s remark.

Billionaire Elon Musk has shared at least eight posts about judges’ relatives, getting more than 75 million views. REUTERS/Kevin Lamarque

In March, the judiciary launched a task force to propose steps for maintaining the security and independence of courts and judges, according to a memo from the judiciary’s administrative arm to federal judges and other court staff.

Such efforts, however, have done little to quell the broadsides from Trump and his allies. Trump's attorney general, Pam Bondi, has referred to the judges who ruled against the administration's interests as "out of control" and said they "need to be removed."

One federal judge told Reuters that the Trump administration's inflammatory rhetoric encourages the hostility aimed at judges and feared it ultimately would inspire true believers to violence.

"The Justice Department doesn't understand the fire they're dealing with," the judge said. "The public discussion of 'out-of-control judges' turns out the crazy."

Underlining those concerns is evidence that some of those who threaten judges' family members know their home addresses.

A commenter on X urged revealing the judge and his daughter's address and other personal identifying details.

Reuters identified at least a dozen judges who, after ruling against the Trump administration, have had pizzas delivered to their homes by anonymous senders – a tactic law enforcement characterized as a form of intimidation meant to convey that a target's address is known.

In March, U.S. Marshals in the Southern District of New York said in a bulletin they were investigating Domino's Pizza deliveries "that were not legitimately ordered by judges to their residence." The orders had been made through a Domino's app, it said. Domino's did not respond to requests for comment.

A pizza was sent to the home of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett the weekend after the judge, a Trump appointee, joined a 5-4 decision in March against the administration's bid to freeze foreign aid, a person familiar with the matter told Reuters. That same weekend, [a bomb threat targeted her sister](#) in South Carolina, a Charleston Police Department report said.

In recent weeks, the pizza deliveries have taken a more sinister turn. At least 10 judges have received anonymous pizza deliveries that were ordered using the name "Daniel Anderl," the late son of Judge Salas, according to the judge, who shared with Reuters information she received from other judges and the Marshals.

A voicemail left in March for a federal judge who ruled against the Trump administration.

In 2020, Daniel Anderl was killed by a disgruntled lawyer from a case heard by Salas. Posing as a delivery driver, the assailant shot Anderl, 20, when he answered the door at the judge's home. The attacker also wounded Salas' husband before killing himself.

Another federal judge told Reuters that someone using his spouse's name and email address arranged a pizza delivery to his home after he ruled against a Trump administration action in March. His spouse was "alarmed and chilled" that a stranger knew her personal information, the judge said.

A week later, the same judge received a terrifying email: "I hope some terrorist kills you and your family." Marshals reviewed security precautions with the spouse's workplace and alerted local police, the judge said.

"Somebody is going to get killed," the judge added. "That's where it all leads eventually, and I think that's what we're all terrified about."

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