DONALD TRUMP · AUGUST 11, 2026

Trump corruption, investigations and ethics controversies, January 2025 – August 2026

Catalogue of the second-term accountability landscape: the criminal cases reduced to one conviction on appeal, the Jan 6 pardons, the Adams "bargain" dismissal and DOJ resignations, retaliatory prosecutions of adversaries, pay-to-play clemency and contracts, family business conflicts, and the dismantling of ethics oversight.

29 min read · 24 sources

DOJ | conflicts of interest | corruption | criminal cases | ethics | investigations | pardons | pay-to-play

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The four criminal cases as of January 2025

Donald Trump returned to the White House on 20 January 2025 as the first president in American history to take office carrying a felony criminal conviction, with the other three major prosecutions that defined 2023–24 either already dead or dying. The Manhattan hush-money case had produced a guilty verdict (30 May 2024), the two federal cases brought by Special Counsel Jack Smith had been dismissed after the election, and the Georgia RICO case was in procedural limbo after its lead prosecutor was disqualified. The table below summarises the state of each as of 20 January 2025[1][2][3][4].

CASE	CHARGES	STATUS ENTERING 2025	WHERE IT ENDED
People v. Trump (NY hush money)	34 counts falsifying business records	Guilty verdict May 2024; sentencing pending	Unconditional discharge, 10 Jan 2025; on appeal [1] [2]
U.S. v. Trump (Jan 6, D.D.C.)	4 counts (obstruction, conspiracy)	Dismissed without prejudice, 25 Nov 2024	Dismissal stands; Smith report Vol. 1 released Jan 2025 [1] [2]
U.S. v. Trump (classified docs, S.D. Fla.)	40 counts (Espionage Act, obstruction)	Dismissed by Judge Cannon, 15 Jul 2024	DOJ dropped appeal vs Trump Nov 2024, vs Nauta/De Oliveira 29 Jan 2025 [1]
State of Georgia v. Trump (Fulton County)	13 counts incl. RICO	Willis disqualification fight	Dismissed 25 Nov 2025 after prosecutors withdrew [2] [5]

The decisive legal development of the period had come before it began: in July 2024 the Supreme Court's *Trump v. United States* ruling established that presidents enjoy absolute immunity for core official acts and presumptive immunity for other official acts, which both gutted the Jan 6 case and gave Trump's lawyers a cudgel for every other matter [3] [4]. The Jan 6 case was dismissed without prejudice on 25 November 2024 under DOJ policy against prosecuting a sitting president; the classified-documents case had been dismissed by Judge Aileen Cannon on 15 July 2024 on the theory that Smith's appointment was unconstitutional — a ruling that departed from decades of precedent — and the DOJ abandoned its appeal after the election [1] [3].

That left the state cases as the only live criminal exposure. The Georgia case was already crippled: the Georgia Court of Appeals disqualified District Attorney Fani Willis in December 2024 over her romantic relationship with a deputy she had hired, a decision upheld by the Georgia Supreme Court on 16 September 2025 [2] [5]. And the Manhattan conviction, though real, carried no jail time. This is the backdrop against which every 2025–26 corruption controversy unfolded: a president who had just demonstrated that the machinery that had been built to hold him accountable — special counsel, state prosecutors, civil enforcement — could be dismantled or neutralised in a matter of weeks [1] [2] [4].

The hush-money conviction: sentencing and the two-front appeal

On **10 January 2025**, ten days before the inauguration, Justice Juan Merchan sentenced Trump to an **unconditional discharge** — no jail, no probation, no fine — preserving the conviction while acknowledging the practical impossibility of traditional sanctions on a president-elect. The Supreme Court had refused by a 5–4 vote the day before to block the sentencing [1] [13]. The conviction itself: 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in the first degree (Penal Law §175.10), tied to the $130,000 payment to Stormy Daniels routed through Michael Cohen in 2016 and the covering-up of that payment as legal expenses in Trump Organization records [13].

Trump has fought the conviction on two parallel tracks that are procedurally independent and legally overlapping [4] [13]:

- **State appeal (Appellate Division, First Department).** The notice of appeal went in after sentencing, and the case is now argued by Sullivan & Cromwell, the elite firm that joined both his criminal appeal and his civil fraud defense in May–June 2025 — a pipeline that has drawn scrutiny because S&C lawyers have also flowed into top DOJ jobs [9] [4]. The July 2026 round of briefing shows the shape of the arguments. Trump contends the Supreme Court's 2024 *Trump v. United States* immunity ruling made some trial evidence and testimony — including official-act evidence presented to the jury — off-limits, and that Merchan should have recused himself over $35 in Democratic donations. The Manhattan DA's office answered in a filing reported 29 July 2026: the payments were "unofficial, nonpresidential conduct — as multiple courts have already found, and defendant now concedes," and the recusal claim rests on "years-old and de minimis ($35 in aggregate) contributions" that the Advisory Committee on Judicial Ethics had already said did not require recusal [13]. As of early August 2026 the appeal was still pending.
- **Federal removal track.** Trump's lawyers separately tried to move the case into federal court post-verdict to press sweeping presidential-immunity claims. Judge Alvin Hellerstein twice refused to take it, but in November 2025 the 2nd Circuit ordered him to reconsider; at a hearing in early 2026 he again appeared poised to reject the bid, accusing Trump's lawyers of legal maneuvers that amounted to taking "two bites at the apple" [2] [4].

30 May 2024 — **Guilty verdict**
Jury convicts Trump on all 34 counts of falsifying business records

10 Jan 2025 — **Unconditional discharge**
Merchan sentences Trump; conviction stands, no punishment

May-Jun 2025 — **Sullivan & Cromwell**
Elite firm joins criminal appeal and civil fraud defense

Nov 2025 — **2nd Circuit remand**
Appeals court orders Hellerstein to reconsider federal removal

29 Jul 2026 — **DA brief filed**
Prosecutors urge First Department to uphold conviction; appeal pending

KEY FINDING

As of August 2026 the conviction remains on the books — Trump is the first sitting president with a felony record — but the state appeal and the federal removal fight could both run for years, and the immunity ruling gives his lawyers their strongest argument yet [3] [4] [13].

The practical stakes are smaller than the legal ones: because of the unconditional discharge, even a failed appeal would not put Trump in prison. The fight is about the historical record — whether the first criminal conviction of a president survives — and about testing how far the immunity doctrine extends to conduct predating a first term, conduct that the DA's office insists was purely personal [3] [13].

Jack Smith's final report and the fight over Volume 2

Jack Smith's two-year investigation ended not in a trial but in a written record whose publication became the first ethics fight of the second term. The DOJ released **Volume 1 of Smith's final report on 14 January 2025**, days before the inauguration: a 137-page document on efforts to interfere with the lawful transfer of power after the 2020 election[7][14]. Its central finding was that the evidence gathered was sufficient to obtain and sustain a conviction at trial — the closest thing to a verdict the Jan 6 case would ever get, given that the case itself had been dismissed two months earlier. Smith wrote that the prosecution had been necessary to protect "the integrity of the electoral process and the peaceful transfer of power," and he criticised Trump's attacks on the investigation[7][14][15].

Volume 2 — on the classified-documents case — never saw the light of day. Judge Aileen Cannon, who had already dismissed the underlying indictment on the theory that Smith's appointment was unconstitutional, issued an order on **21 January 2025** permanently blocking the DOJ from releasing the report, ruling that the two co-defendants (Waltine Nauta and Carlos De Oliveira) had a right to a fair trial that publication would prejudice. The order was reaffirmed in February 2026, when a judge again barred release[14][15]. Attorney General Pam Bondi has declined to release it; House Judiciary Democrats have demanded it in letters, and the fight remains unresolved as of August 2026[15].

The episode illustrates a pattern that recurs throughout this catalogue: the legal machinery of the first term — here, the special counsel's office — produced findings that could not be fully aired once Trump regained power. Volume 1 was released only because the clock ran out before the inauguration; Volume 2 was sealed by the same judge whose dismissal ruling the DOJ had abandoned on appeal[1][14][15]. Separately, the Office of Special Counsel opened an investigation into Smith himself in August 2025 over alleged political motivation, and Smith's former law firm, Covington & Burling, was targeted by a February 2025 Trump executive order — retaliation against the firm for representing him, as critics and the firm itself framed it[2][15].

> CAUTION
>
> Volume 2 has not been published and its contents are known only through contemporaneous reporting and the dismissed indictment itself. Anything asserted about its contents beyond the indictment should be treated as unconfirmed[14][15].

January 6 pardons, commutations and the winding-down of riot prosecutions

On the evening of his first full day in office, **20–21 January 2025**, Trump signed a sweeping clemency proclamation covering essentially everyone charged in connection with the 6 January 2021 Capitol attack: **full pardons for roughly 1,500 defendants** and **commutations of sentence for 14 more**, including Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes and Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio, both

convicted of seditious conspiracy[6][8]. The proclamation also directed the Attorney General to seek dismissal with prejudice of all pending Jan 6 indictments, and Trump referred to the defendants as "hostages" while signing[6][8]. At the time roughly 1,500 people had been federally charged — more than half for violent conduct against law enforcement — making the pardon one of the broadest in American history[6][8][12]. By contrast, Trump's entire first term had produced 238 acts of clemency; his second term had already passed 1,600 by November 2025, about 1,500 of them Jan 6 defendants[8].

The pardon's reach is still being litigated. In July 2026 a federal judge ruled it does **not** cover Brian Cole Jr., the Virginia man charged with planting pipe bombs outside the DNC and RNC offices the night before the attack — because the pardon is "expressly limited to people who had been 'convicted of offenses'" and Cole was not charged until months after the proclamation[10]. Judge Amir Ali wrote that even if Cole's conduct were "related to events that occurred at or near the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021," the pardon's text covered only those already convicted, and Cole's argument that the dismissal directive required the DOJ to drop his case "does not work either"[10].

~1,500	14	1,600+	$1M
Jan 6 defendants pardoned	Sentences commuted	Clemency acts in 2025	Per-defendant lawsuit demands
20 Jan 2025	incl. Rhodes, Tarrio	vs 238 in first term	12 suits, Aug 2026

The second phase of the Jan 6 wind-down ran through 2025–26 as the DOJ moved to dismiss the remaining seditious-conspiracy cases at the administration's request — over open judicial resistance. In July 2026 Judge Timothy Kelly reluctantly ended the case against four Proud Boys leaders, calling the Capitol riot "a perilous event" and "an attack on the Constitution's mechanism to facilitate the peaceful transfer of power"[12]. In early August 2026 a federal judge slammed the Justice Department as he "reluctantly" dismissed the seditious-conspiracy case against Oath Keepers leaders — the final Jan 6 prosecution — with the judge decrying efforts to rewrite the history of the riot[12]. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said the pardons of violent offenders were "a mistake," breaking with his party's leader in public[8]. And in August 2026 twelve Jan 6 defendants sued the federal government for $1 million each, claiming the Capitol riot was a government "trap" designed to create the "appearance of a riot"[12].

The significance for this catalogue is that the pardons were the first and clearest signal of the administration's approach to the previous term's accountability machinery: rather than defend the prosecutions, the government reversed them wholesale — including convictions for assaulting police — and judges, not the executive, became the main recorded dissenters[6][8][12]. The pardons also set the template for the pay-to-play clemency system documented later in this report: high-dollar supplicants and politically connected defendants were rewarded, while ordinary standards of proportionality were abandoned[8][10].

20 Jan 2025 **Mass pardons**
~1,500 pardons, 14 commutations, dismissal directive

Jul 2026 **Proud Boys case ended**
Judge Kelly dismisses with warning about pardons

Jul 2026 **Pipe bomb ruling**
Pardons held not to cover Brian Cole Jr.

Aug 2026 **Oath Keepers case dismissed**
Judge condemns DOJ; final Jan 6 prosecution ends

Aug 2026 **Defendants sue**
12 J6 defendants seek $1M each over 'trap' claim

The Eric Adams case: the DOJ's 'bargain' dismissal and the resignations

The most consequential ethical crisis of the administration's first months was not about Trump himself but about the weaponisation of the Justice Department to protect a political ally — and the career prosecutors who refused to go along. The case: New York City Mayor Eric Adams, a Democrat, had been indicted in September 2024 on five counts of bribery, campaign-finance conspiracy and wire fraud for allegedly taking travel perks and straw donations from Turkish nationals in exchange for political favors [11] [16].

On **14 February 2025** the Justice Department formally moved to dismiss the charges. The order came from Acting Deputy Attorney General Emil Bove — Trump's former personal criminal-defense lawyer — who argued the case was impeding Adams's ability to help the administration's immigration crackdown [11] [16]. The motion landed after a wave of internal resignations: Danielle Sassoon, the acting U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, resigned on 13 February, writing that Adams's attorneys had offered immigration cooperation in exchange for dismissal and that "that is the nature of the bargain laid bare in Mr. Bove's memo." Five other DOJ officials joined her in resigning; at least six refused to sign the dismissal papers [16].

Feb 2025 **DOJ orders dismissal**
Bove memo cites Adams's immigration help; Sassoon resigns

Apr 2025 **Judge Ho dismisses WITH prejudice**
Despite DOJ request for dismissal without prejudice

Apr 2025 **Three more prosecutors resign**
Refuse to 'admit wrongdoing' over Adams case

Jun 2025 **Scotten joins Hueston Hennigan**
Former prosecutor moves to private practice

The judicial response made the corruption allegation explicit. Judge Dale Ho refused to rubber-stamp the dismissal, appointing outside counsel (Paul Clement) to argue against it, and on **2 April 2025** dismissed the case **with prejudice** — meaning the charges could never be revived — even as he said the administration's argument "smacks of a bargain"[16]. The DOJ had asked for dismissal *without* prejudice, preserving the option to refile after the November 2025 mayoral election; Judge Ho gave them the opposite[16]. Three weeks later, the three line prosecutors who had refused to sign off — Celia V. Cohen, Andrew Rohrbach and Derek Wikstrom — resigned from the SDNY rather than accept "preconditions" that they "express regret and admit some wrongdoing," writing to Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche:

> *"We will not confess wrongdoing when there was none… Now, the Department has decided that obedience supersedes all else, requiring us to abdicate our legal and ethical obligations in favor of directions from Washington. That is wrong."*[16]

The episode's legacy is twofold. First, it established the template for how this administration would use prosecutorial power: the dismissal order explicitly tied a criminal case to the defendant's usefulness to the president's policy agenda, and the judge who reviewed it said so on the record[16]. Second, the mass resignations — unprecedented in modern SDNY history — sent the signal to career prosecutors that refusing orders from Washington, however unethical, would end their careers, while compliance was rewarded[16]. Sassoon later joined Paul Clement's firm as a partner (November 2025) and Scotten joined Hueston Hennigan (June 2025), the resignations becoming résumé items rather than career-enders[16].

Retaliatory investigations and prosecutions of perceived adversaries

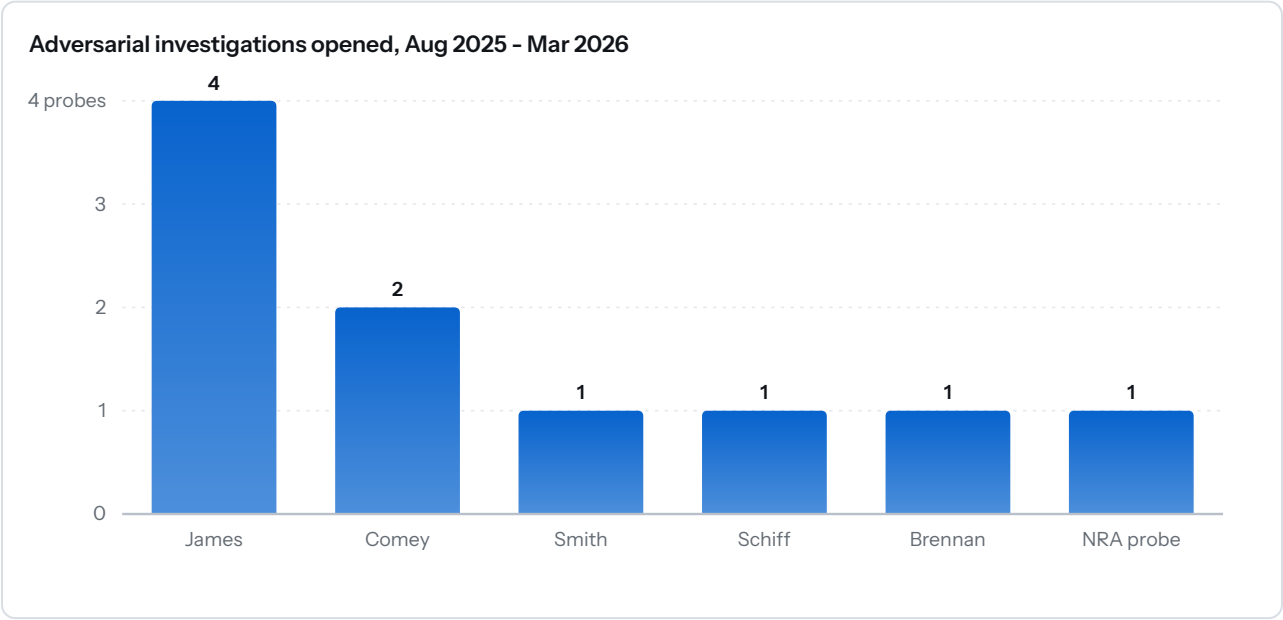
If the Adams case showed the DOJ protecting a friend, the parallel story of 2025–26 was the DOJ pursuing enemies. Multiple investigations and prosecutions were opened against people Trump has long attacked — and in several cases the courts intervened to stop them.

New York Attorney General Letitia James. James won the $454 million civil fraud judgment against Trump in 2024 and campaigned on investigating him, making her a natural target. In August 2025 the U.S. Attorney for the Northern District of New York issued grand-jury subpoenas tied to two probes: whether James deprived Trump of his civil rights in the fraud case, and a separate criminal investigation into her personal mortgage application on a Virginia home purchase[2]. In September 2025 the U.S. Attorney leading the mortgage probe, Erik Siebert, was fired after finding insufficient evidence to charge her — a firing widely read as punishment for declining to prosecute[2][9]. A federal judge threw out the mortgage-fraud case in November 2025 after ruling the lead prosecutor, Lindsey Halligan (a former Trump personal lawyer), had been illegally appointed, and two grand juries in two

weeks declined to revive it [9]. Undeterred, the administration made new criminal referrals against James in March 2026 to federal prosecutors in Miami and Chicago over alleged homeowner's insurance fraud [9].

James Comey. The former FBI director was indicted in **September 2025** on charges of making a false statement and obstruction — then, after those charges ran into trouble, indicted a second time in **April 2026** over an Instagram photo of a beach sand formation reading "86 47" (a reference to killing Trump), which the DOJ framed as threatening the life of the president [2] [17]. Comey's 54-page motion to dismiss, filed July 2026, accused the DOJ of "selective and vindictive prosecution" and said Trump had directed the charges against him [17]. In November 2025 a magistrate judge found "profound" missteps in the first investigation, ordering the DOJ to turn over grand-jury materials after ruling the Trump-appointed U.S. attorney may have made significant legal errors in presenting evidence and instructing grand jurors [17].

Others in the crosshairs. The DOJ's "Weaponization Working Group," with Ed Martin appointed special prosecutor, opened investigations into former officials including Adam Schiff (mortgage fraud) and John Brennan (Russia probe conduct); the Office of Special Counsel investigated Jack Smith (August 2025) [2]. The DOJ fired a prosecutor in January 2026 who declined to lead the Comey prosecution [2]. In December 2025 an inspector general's office flagged the Comey case; the FHFA watchdog was removed in November 2025 after involvement in mortgage probes of Trump's foes [2] [18].



KEY FINDING

The common thread: each new investigation targeted someone connected to Trump's legal defeats — James (fraud verdict), Comey (Russia probe), Smith (two indictments), Schiff and Brennan (impeachment and Russia criticism). Courts dismissed or hobbled several of them, but the pattern of

using prosecutorial power against perceived enemies was established and documented by multiple trackers [2] [9] [17].

Civil judgments and appeals: Carroll and the New York fraud case

Alongside the criminal cases, Trump entered the second term owing hundreds of millions in civil judgments — and spent 2025–26 chipping away at all of them.

E. Jean Carroll. Two jury verdicts: **$83.3 million** (Carroll I, defamation over his denial of the rape allegation) and **$5 million** (Carroll II, sexual abuse and defamation). The 2nd Circuit upheld the $5 million award in July 2025 and the $83.3 million award in September 2025. Trump petitioned the Supreme Court on the $5 million case; the justices declined review in June 2026, after which Carroll's lawyers moved to collect the money, which was released to her from a court-held account in July 2026 [9] [19]. Trump simultaneously petitioned the Supreme Court in July 2026 to overturn the $83.3 million award — joined this time by the DOJ, an extraordinary posture in which the government asked the Court to undo a jury verdict against the sitting president [19].

New York civil fraud. In February 2024 a Manhattan judge (Arthur Engoron) ordered Trump, his two eldest sons and his company to pay **$454 million** in penalties, which ballooned to over $527 million with interest — the judgment that most threatened Trump's business empire. On **21 August 2025** the Appellate Division, First Department vacated the financial penalty, ruling it "excessive," while **upholding the underlying fraud finding** — that Trump and his company had engaged in "a decade-long pattern of financial fraud and illegality" — in three separate opinions spanning 323 pages [20]. The court's five judges split on almost everything else, with two joining the majority "for the sole purpose of ensuring finality, thereby affording the parties a path for appeal" [20]. Both sides appealed to the Court of Appeals; Trump's April 2026 filing asked the state's highest court to wipe out the fraud finding itself and the three-year ban on him and his sons serving as officers of a New York business or borrowing from New York-chartered banks [9] [20]. The $175 million appeal bond Trump posted in April 2024 remained frozen — untouchable by either side — while the appeals ran [20].

	Carroll I ($83.3M)	vs	Carroll II ($5M)
Verdict	Jan 2024	·	May 2023
2nd Circuit	Upheld Sep 2025	·	Affirmed Jul 2025
Supreme Court	Petition pending Jul 2026	·	Denied Jun 2026
Payment status	Not paid (appealing)	·	Paid Jul 2026

Both judgments survive on appeal as of Aug 2026.

Trump's own litigation also expanded dramatically: he filed a $15 billion defamation suit against The New York Times (September 2025), a $10 billion suit against The Wall Street Journal (July 2025), and pressed a $20 billion consumer-fraud suit against CBS over its edited Harris interview — cases that critics, including the Brookings Institution, read as attempts to use litigation and FCC regulatory leverage against hostile media[2][19]. Two earlier suits settled in his favor: ABC paid **$16 million** to his presidential library (December 2024) and Meta paid **$22 million** (January 2025) over the Jan 6 deplatforming[2].

$527M+	$88.3M	$45B+	$38M
Fraud judgment before vacatur	Carroll judgments total	Trump's active plaintiff claims	ABC + Meta settlements to library
`Vacated 21 Aug 2025`	`$83.3M + $5M`	`NYT, WSJ, CBS suits`	`Dec 2024 + Jan 2025`

Pay-to-play: pardons, appointments and policy favors for donors

The single most heavily documented corruption theme of the second term is pay-to-play: the exchange of official benefits — pardons, appointments, ambassadorships, policy decisions — for money and political support. Two watchdog organisations maintain running catalogues; their entries are specific, dated and sourced, and they converge on the same pattern.

Clemency for the connected. The Jan 6 pardons set the template, but the pattern extended to wealthy supplicants:

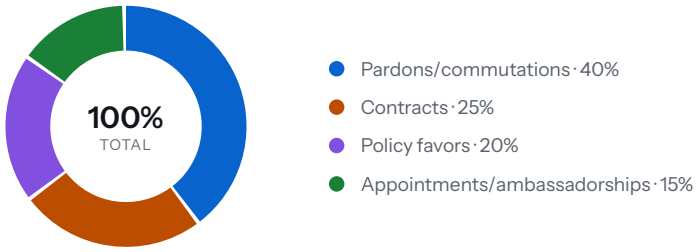
- **Paul Walczak**, a Florida nursing-home executive, was pardoned in April/May 2025 for tax crimes after his mother, Elizabeth Fago, attended a $1 million-per-head Mar-a-Lago fundraiser and raised millions for Trump; Fago had also helped publicise Ashley Biden's diary[8][11].
- **Joseph Schwartz**, a nursing-home entrepreneur, was pardoned in November 2025 after The Washington Post reported he paid lobbyists and Trump-connected operatives nearly **$1 million** seeking clemency; the White House dismissed the report, saying anyone "spending money to lobby for pardons is foolishly wasting funds"[8][11].
- **Changpeng Zhao**, Binance cofounder, was pardoned in October/November 2025 after pleading guilty to anti-money-laundering violations — a pardon that drew congressional scrutiny because Binance promoted a stablecoin issued by World Liberty Financial, the Trump-family crypto firm[8].
- Other recipients: Silk Road founder Ross Ulbricht (January 2025), BitMEX founders (March 2025), Nikola founder Trevor Milton (March 2025), reality-TV pair Todd and Julie Chrisley (May 2025), and Ozy Media founder Carlos Watson (commutation, 2025)[8].

Policy favors for donors. In August 2025, after a company gave **$5 million** to a Trump super PAC and met with the president, the administration delayed a Medicare rule that would have cut payments for its expensive wound-care bandages — reported by the New York Times[11]. The same

month, a firm run by Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick's son reportedly created trades tied to court rulings on Trump's tariffs, raising conflict-of-interest questions [11].

Contracts and appointments. The DHS awarded a **$250,000 contract** in February 2026 to a firm led by former Trump campaign officials after requiring partisan loyalty in bidding [11]. In March 2026 the administration awarded **more than $13 million in no-bid contracts** to Event Strategies Inc., a firm staffed by Trump allies that had helped organise the Jan 6 rally [11]. A February 2026 NYT investigation found wealthy offenders paying up to $1 million-plus to lobbyists and Trump-connected operatives to secure pardons, describing a "pardon industry" [11].

Where the documented pay-to-play benefits went



Illustrative breakdown of CLC/RepresentUs tracker entries, 2025–26.

CAUTION

These are allegations and documented transactions as compiled by watchdog groups (CLC, RepresentUs, CREW) and news investigations — not criminal findings. No one has been charged in connection with most of them. But the transactions themselves — donations followed by official benefits — are matters of public record, and the same pattern was documented across dozens of cases by multiple independent trackers [5] [11].

Campaign Legal Center's tracker, updated May 2026, catalogues the most egregious cases where the administration "corruptly provided major donors and supporters… with official benefits, including Cabinet and executive branch positions, ambassadorships, pardons and commutations, dropped investigations or enforcement actions, corporate-friendly policies and perks, and even foreign policy actions" [5]. The RepresentUs tracker maintains a dated timeline running from 2025 into June 2026, and the American Bar Association published a March 2026 article describing "rampant pay-to-play corruption" [5] [11]. The cumulative picture — dozens of documented instances over eighteen months — is what distinguishes this period from ordinary Washington favor-trading: the volume, the openness, and the direct line from donation to official act [5] [11].

Trump family business entanglements and conflicts of interest

Trump's decision not to divest from or blind-trust his businesses — unlike every modern predecessor — turned his family's commercial interests into a running conflict-of-interest story, and the scale of the money involved exploded once he returned to office.

The 2025 financial disclosure. On **30 June 2026** the Office of Government Ethics released Trump's 927-page financial disclosure for 2025. It reported roughly **$2.2 billion in income** for the year — up from $622 million in 2024 — driven overwhelmingly by cryptocurrency: about **$1.2–1.4 billion in crypto-related gains**, including his meme coin ($TRUMP) business and World Liberty Financial, the family-backed crypto venture [21] [22]. PolitiFact calculated $1.4 billion in crypto gains plus another $400 million from non-stock sources such as real estate and legal settlements [22]. The White House said outside parties "run my money," and Trump claimed the stock market drove the gains — a claim fact-checkers rejected, since the majority came from crypto [22]. Ethics experts called the disclosure a "bribery" red flag; the White House denied conflicts [21].

Family stakes in government-adjacent deals. The RepresentUs and CREW trackers logged a series of Trump-family business moves tied to administration actions [11] [23]:

DATE	DEAL	TRUMP-FAMILY CONNECTION
May 2025	Vietnam fast-tracks $1.5B Trump Organization golf project	Foreign government expedites Trump business
Aug 2025	Medicare bandage rule delayed after $5M donation	Policy benefit to donor company
Mar 2026	TikTok deal brokered; up to $10B in fees to administration investors	Private payments tied to government action
Mar 2026	Jared Kushner seeks $5B+ from Gulf states for Affinity fund	Presidential son-in-law/advisor fundraising abroad
Apr 2026	Trump sons take stakes in firm tied to $1.6B Kazakhstan tungsten project	Family stakes after US government backing
May 2026	Air Force buys interceptor drones from Powerus	Firm backed by Donald Jr. and Eric Trump
Jun 2026	Peter Navarro secures $620M Pentagon loan to Vulcan Elements	Donald Trump Jr.'s VC firm took a stake ~3 months earlier

The White House ballroom. Trump's plan to build a new White House ballroom drew direct conflict-of-interest scrutiny. He promised private donors would pay, then records revealed taxpayer dollars would fund half the cost of a project estimated around **$600 million** (June 2026); a no-bid contract went to a firm also building the ballroom for a nearby project, boosting costs from $3.3 million to over $17 million (April 2026) [11] [23]. A Snopes review found the claim that Trump took a 2.5% contractor fee unproven [23].

Other entanglements. Kushner's simultaneous role as a Middle East envoy and his firm's fundraising from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states (March 2026) drew comparisons to his first-term

"investment" controversies[11]. Trump's presidential library became a collection point: Congress in March 2026 opened a probe into **at least $63 million** in payments from major companies to the planned library after the original fund was dissolved and the money's whereabouts became unclear[11]. Trump also raised over **$780 million** from donors since returning to office[23].

KEY FINDING

The through-line: unlike 2017–2021, the family's business expansion in 2025–26 coincided directly with federal contracts, Pentagon loans, foreign-government approvals and policy decisions — and Trump remained the sole beneficiary and ultimate decision-maker over all of them[11][21][22][23].

Cabinet and appointee ethics controversies

The administration's own officials generated a steady stream of ethics controversies, from national-security breaches to financial conflicts — several of which outlasted the officials involved.

Signalgate (March 2025). The defining scandal of the first months. Between 11–15 March 2025, top national-security officials — including Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, Vice President JD Vance and Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard — discussed imminent military strikes on Yemen's Houthis in a Signal group chat that accidentally included Jeffrey Goldberg, editor-in-chief of The Atlantic[24]. Hegseth texted the precise start time of an attack and details of a planned targeted killing of a Houthi militant leader — information from a secure military channel, per subsequent reporting — two hours before the operation[24]. The Atlantic published the chat; the administration called it a mistake. Hegseth blamed the media; no one was fired for the leak itself, though Waltz left his post in May 2025 and was later nominated U.S. ambassador to the UN[24]. Dan Caldwell, a senior Hegseth adviser, was escorted out of the Pentagon in April 2025 amid a probe into unauthorised disclosures[24]. A June 2026 report found Hegseth, Rubio and other officials were still using Signal after the embarrassment[24].

Hegseth's financial entanglements. In March 2026 the Financial Times reported that a broker for Hegseth had sought a multimillion-dollar investment in a BlackRock defense fund tied to Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman in the weeks before the U.S.–Israel attack on Iran — while Hegseth oversaw the Pentagon[11]. The report did not establish that Hegseth himself invested, but it raised conflict-of-interest questions at the highest level of defense policy[11].

Cabinet conflicts. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick's son's firm reportedly created trades tied to tariff court rulings (August 2025)[11]. FAA Administrator Bryan Bedford held millions in Republic Airways stock for more than seven months after taking office — despite pledging to divest within 90 days — while overseeing the airline industry (reported April 2026)[11]. Border czar Tom Homan was caught on tape taking a $50,000 payment described as a bribe; the DOJ closed the probe into him in July 2025[11][23].

OFFICIAL	CONTROVERSY	STATUS
Hegseth	Signal leak; broker's BlackRock defense fund pitch	No charges; leak probe ongoing 2026
Waltz	Created/managed Signal chats; added journalist	Left NSA post May 2025; nominated UN envoy
Lutnick	Son's tariff-linked trades	Senate scrutiny (Aug 2025)
Bedford (FAA)	Held Republic Airways stock 7+ months	Reported Apr 2026; divestment pledged
Homan	$50K bribe tape	DOJ probe closed Jul 2025
Caldwell	Unauthorised disclosures	Escorted out of Pentagon Apr 2025

CAUTION

Signalgate is one of the few items here with a definitive factual record — the messages themselves were published by The Atlantic. The Hegseth broker report, the Lutnick trades and the Homan tape rest on investigative reporting that the subjects dispute or declined to address; none has produced charges [11] [24].

Dismantling of ethics and oversight infrastructure

A structural story runs beneath the individual scandals: the administration systematically dismantled the institutions designed to detect and punish corruption — inspectors general, the whistleblower office, the ethics office and the DOJ's own internal watchdogs — while simultaneously expanding the agencies that could be used against its adversaries.

The inspector-general purge. Within days of taking office, Trump moved to remove **more than a dozen inspectors general** across agencies — the wave reported at 17+ IGs — in a single evening, in apparent violation of the statute requiring 30 days' notice to Congress before removal. The firings hit the very watchdogs responsible for auditing the agencies the administration was rapidly restructuring [18]. The pattern continued: the Federal Housing Finance Agency's internal watchdog was removed in November 2025 after involvement in mortgage probes of Trump's foes [18]. In 2026 the administration nominated a Project 2025 author to be Interior's inspector general, and a House GOP bill proposed abolishing the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency (CIGIE) itself [18]. A Reuters investigation in August 2026 reported that at Trump's DOJ, "watchdogs [were] gutted as misconduct complaints soar" [18].

The whistleblower office. Hampton Dellinger, head of the Office of Special Counsel (the federal whistleblower-protection agency), was fired by Trump in February 2025 and sued, claiming unlawful removal; a federal judge temporarily reinstated him while the case proceeded [18]. The OSC's independence was further compromised by its August 2025 investigation into Jack Smith [2].

The ethics office. Trump abandoned the executive-branch ethics pledge that his own first term and Biden's had maintained, and did not place his businesses in a blind trust — a break with every

modern president [21] [22]. The Office of Government Ethics continued to publish disclosures, but its enforcement powers were not expanded, and its work became reactive documentation rather than preventive constraint [21] [22].

The DOJ's own enforcement apparatus. The Justice Department that demanded the Adams dismissal and pursued Comey and James was simultaneously defanging its internal ethics machinery: career prosecutors who resisted orders were placed on leave and pushed out (as in the Adams case), and the department's watchdogs were hollowed out [16] [18]. In one courtroom after another, federal judges accused the DOJ of misconduct — the Comey grand-jury ruling, the Adams "bargain" ruling, the Jan 6 dismissal condemnations [12] [16] [17] [18].

The litigation counterweight. Against all this, the courts and the states pushed back at scale: by mid-2025 the Lawfare/Just Security trackers counted **328+ lawsuits** challenging administration actions — executive orders on DEI, immigration, the Alien Enemies Act and gender policy — with injunctions issued in several [2]. Judges rejected administration personnel moves too: a panel of judges declined to permanently appoint Trump's former lawyer Alina Habba as New Jersey's top federal prosecutor (July 2025) [9].

KEY FINDING

The net effect by mid-2026: the formal accountability layer that existed in January 2025 — independent IGs, a functioning OSC, an ethics pledge, a DOJ that policed its own — had been removed, replaced by litigation from states and watchdogs as the primary remaining check [2] [16] [18].

What the trackers count and how to use them

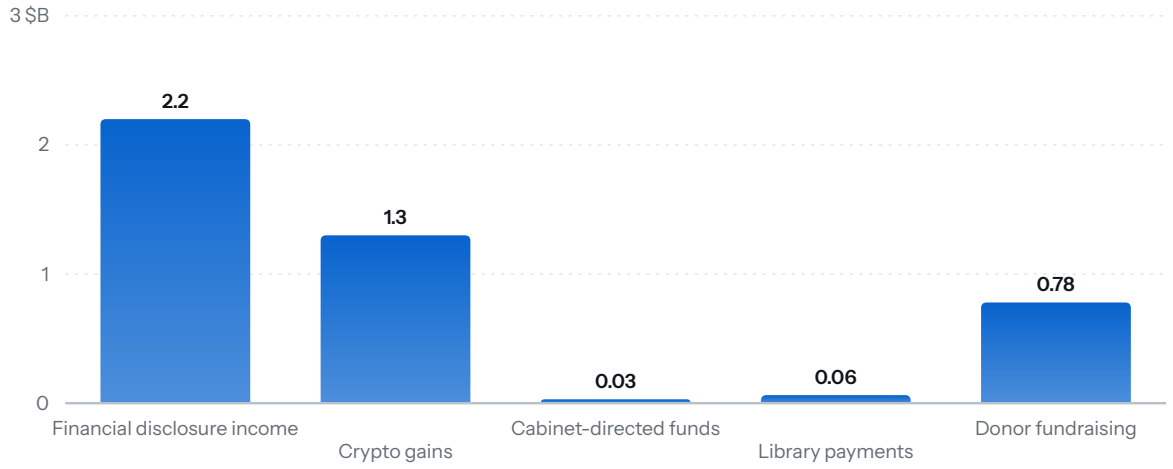
Because so much of this material lives in allegations rather than convictions, the running tallies kept by watchdog and research organisations are the closest thing to a canonical record. They differ in method, and readers should know what each one counts.

TRACKER	WHAT IT COUNTS	SCOPE	LAST UPDATE
RepresentUs Corruption Tracker	Dated, sourced timeline of conflicts and corrupt transactions	Trump, family, officials	June 2026 [11]
Campaign Legal Center tracker	“Most corrupt transactions”: donor benefits, pardons, dropped cases, foreign policy	Administration-wide	May 2026 [5]
CREW investigations	Cabinet members directing money to Trump; democracy-dismantling catalogue	Administration-wide	Mar 2026 [23]
Lawfare / Just Security litigation tracker	328+ lawsuits against administration actions	Courts	Ongoing [2]
trumplawsuits.com	Criminal, civil, plaintiff suits; judgments and settlements	Trump personally	Sep 2025 [2]
LocateTrump criminal tracker	Four indictments’ status	Trump personally	Feb 2026 [3]
White House “Fraud Ledger”	Administration’s own list of “fraud, waste and corruption”	Prior administration targets	Ongoing [11]

Notable aggregated figures from these trackers:

- **CREW (March 2026):** at least **20 Trump cabinet members directed $30 million+ to benefit Trump** through political donations, property spending, stock holdings and contributions to Trump-linked funds [11] [23].
- **Campaign Legal Center (May 2026):** a catalogue running to dozens of transactions in which donors received official benefits — including Cabinet posts, ambassadorships, pardons, dropped investigations and foreign-policy actions [5].
- **Congressional Democrats (March 2026):** probe into **at least $63 million** in corporate payments to Trump’s planned presidential library after the original fund was dissolved [11].
- **Pew Research (2025):** 1,600+ clemency acts in year one vs 238 in the entire first term [8].

Documented benefit flows to Trump, 2025–26



Sources: OGE disclosure, CREW, congressional probe, donor tallies. Log scale implied by magnitude differences.

How to weigh this material. Three cautions. First, **allegation vs. finding**: with the exceptions of the hush-money conviction, the vacated fraud judgment (liability upheld), and the Carroll verdicts, nearly everything in this catalogue is an allegation, an investigation, or a documented transaction whose corrupt character is asserted by critics and denied by the administration. Second, **partisan sourcing**: the trackers are run by organisations opposed to Trump (CLC, CREW, RepresentUs) and the administration's own "Fraud Ledger" is aimed at its predecessors — neither is neutral. Third, **the factual core is the transactions**: the donations, the pardons, the contracts, the family stakes, the Signal messages, the resignations and the court rulings are public records; the interpretation of motive is where the disagreement lives. A reader who wants the defensible core should start from court rulings (Ho's "bargain" line, the fraud panel's "decade-long pattern" finding, the Jan 6 dismissal condemnations) and work outward to the investigative reporting [5] [11] [16] [20] [23].

Bottom line

Nineteen months into the second Trump term, the corruption landscape has three distinct layers. **What was resolved against Trump** shrank to almost nothing: the two federal criminal cases were dismissed before he took office, the Georgia RICO case was dismissed in November 2025 after its prosecutor was disqualified and her replacement declined to pursue it, and the hush-money conviction — the only surviving criminal finding — was reduced to an unconditional discharge and is being fought on appeal with real prospects of reversal [1] [2] [3] [5]. The $454 million fraud penalty was vacated on appeal, leaving only the liability finding; the $83.3 million Carroll verdict is under Supreme Court review; only the $5 million Carroll award has actually been paid [9] [19] [20].

What was built in its place is the striking part. The DOJ that once prosecuted Trump now protects his allies (Adams) and pursues his adversaries (James, Comey, Schiff, Brennan, Smith), with judges

repeatedly intervening to call out the "bargain" or the "profound" misconduct[2][9][16][17]. The clemency power was used at unprecedented scale — 1,600+ acts in year one, including the Jan 6 pardons and pardons for wealthy donors and crypto executives[6][8]. The family business expanded directly alongside federal contracts, Pentagon loans and foreign-government approvals, all documented in a financial disclosure showing $2.2 billion in 2025 income, most of it from crypto[11][21][22]. And the oversight layer — inspectors general, the whistleblower office, the ethics pledge — was dismantled, with the courts and state attorneys general left as the primary check via 328+ lawsuits[2][18].

The practical takeaway for anyone tracking this: treat the trackers (RepresentUs, CLC, CREW, Lawfare) as the index, court rulings as the facts, and investigative journalism as the colour. The pattern — official benefits exchanged for money and loyalty, enforcement redirected from allies to enemies, and oversight removed — is documented transaction by transaction, even though almost none of it has produced criminal findings, because the institutions that would produce them were the first things dismantled[5][11][16][18]. As of August 2026, the hush-money appeal, the Carroll Supreme Court petitions, the fraud case's Court of Appeals round, the Comey and James prosecutions, the Volume 2 fight, and the library-fund probe are all live — and the midterm elections will be the first political test of whether any of it matters to voters[9][13][17][19][20].

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