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Trump rages after sexual abuse verdict but legal woes have only just begun

Investigations are mounting, making it harder for the former president to spin his troubles as persecution by liberal elites

Chris McGreal in *New York*

Sun 14 May 2023 07:00 BST

If the outcome of Donald Trump's [sexual assault trial](#) wasn't a foregone conclusion, his response to a jury finding he attacked the writer E Jean Carroll was all too predictable.

The former president lashed out at the judge as biased and the jurors as "from an anti-Trump area", meaning liberal [New York](#), after they believed Carroll's account of the millionaire businessman attacking her in a department store changing room in the mid-1990s. The jury ordered him to pay \$5m in damages for "sexual abuse" and for defaming Carroll by accusing her of "a made-up SCAM" for political ends.

Trump has taken [a similar tack](#) against the Manhattan district attorney, Alvin Bragg, after pleading not guilty last month to 34 criminal charges over the payment of hush money to the porn star Stormy Daniels before the 2016 presidential election. Trump called Bragg, who is Black, an "animal" and a psychopath, and characterised the prosecution as purely political.

All of this goes down well in sections of America.

An audience of Republican voters at a CNN town hall with Trump on Wednesday laughed when he described his assault of Carroll as "playing hanky-panky in a dressing room" and called her a "whack job".

But in the coming months it's going to get a lot harder for the former, and possibly future, American president to spin his legal problems as political persecution by Democratic elitists. Investigations against him are mounting, and even more troubled legal waters lie ahead for Trump - and some of his acolytes.

Indictments in conservative Georgia are coming down the line and many of the key witnesses against Trump will be his fellow Republicans, including some who helped him try to rig the 2020 election.

Similarly, investigations by a justice department special counsel into Trump's actions leading up to the 6 January 2021 storming of the Capitol, and the stashing of classified documents at his Florida mansion, are being built on the accounts of aides and political associates who are potential witnesses against him.

Norman Eisen, a former White House special counsel for ethics and government reform, said that as a result Trump's legal troubles have only just begun.

"He's running into a buzzsaw and it's called the rule of law. So he can go on and rant and rave up to a point but the legal authorities are in the process of holding him accountable," he said.

Leading the way is a prosecutor in Atlanta who is stacking up witnesses against the former president, almost all of them Republicans, over his attempt to rig the 2020 presidential election result in Georgia. They include some who tried to help Trump steal the vote but who have been persuaded to give evidence against him to save their own necks.

▲▲ He's running into a buzzsaw and it's called the rule of law Norm Eisen

The Fulton county district attorney, Fani Willis, has spent more than two years investigating the "multi-state, coordinated plan by the Trump campaign to influence the results".

Willis convened a special grand jury that sat for eight months and heard evidence from 75 witnesses before it recommended charges against more than a dozen people. The grand jury forewoman, Emily Kohrs, [strongly hinted](#) to the New York Times in February that Trump was on the list.

Asked if the jurors recommended prosecuting the former president, Kohrs said: "You're not going to be shocked. It's not rocket science."

"It is not going to be some giant plot twist," she added. "You probably have a fair idea of what may be in there. I'm trying very hard to say that delicately."

Willis had been expected to charge Trump and others this month, but indictments are not now likely before mid-July as prosecutors put together immunity deals to lure the former president's Republican co-conspirators to testify against him and his top aides. Kohrs said prosecutors offered one witness immunity from prosecution in return for cooperation right in front of the grand jury.

Then there are the Republicans who do not have to be coerced to tell the truth in court.



📷 E Jean Carroll leaves court after hearing Trump was liable for \$5m in damages for sexual abuse. Photograph: Andrew Kelly/Reuters

Willis's investigation initially focused on a tape recording of Trump pressuring Georgia's Republican secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, to "find" nearly 12,000 votes to cancel out Biden's win in a state that, at the time, looked as if it might decide the outcome of the entire presidential election.

Trump has called the Georgia official an "enemy of the people" because he wouldn't commit electoral fraud. But a jury might find Raffensperger all the more credible because not only is he a Republican, but he voted for Trump.

The Georgia secretary of state spoke to the special grand jury for several hours, including about a call he recorded from Trump at the beginning of January 2021 pressuring him to manipulate the vote. While he has not commented publicly on his testimony, Raffensperger wrote a book, *Integrity Counts*, in which he details Trump threatening him.

Other witnesses are more reluctant but may be all the more credible for that reason, including Georgia's governor, Brian Kemp, who also came under pressure from Trump and his allies to overturn the election result. One of those on the phone to Kemp was Mark Meadows, Trump's former chief of staff, who was also summoned to answer the grand jury's questions.

Willis expanded the investigation as more evidence emerged of Trump and his allies attempting to manipulate the results, including the appointment of a sham slate of 16 electors to replace the state's legitimate members of the electoral college who do the formal business of selecting the president. The fake electors included the chair of the Georgia Republican party, David Shafer, and Republican members of the state legislature who have been warned that they are at risk of prosecution.

Earlier this month it was revealed that at least eight of the fake electors **have done a deal** to give evidence in return from immunity from prosecution, although Shafer is not included.

Eisen said the immunity deals are a sign that charges are in the offing.

"We know that multiple fake electors have received immunity. That is another indication of trouble for **Donald Trump** because those deals are extended by prosecutors typically when they are preparing to bring a case, and they believe they have a case to bring," he said.

"So it's a sign of prosecutorial seriousness. And it's a sign that the district attorney can mount an effective case because these immunised fake electors can serve as tour guides for the jury into the plot, which we know ran all the way up to the Oval Office."

Ronald Carlson, a leading Georgia trial lawyer and professor at the University of Georgia's law school, said prosecutors do not offer immunity lightly and any deal signals that witnesses will provide significant testimony against Trump and his team.

"This is very, very much a straw in the wind. Immunity almost always comes with a requirement that the immunised witness provide testimony in a future criminal trial," he said.

"I think the electors will be very descriptive on how they were called together, what they did during their meeting, and then the end result, which was certifying a result for Trump."

Willis's investigation also probed a seven-hour hearing at the Georgia state senate a month after the election orchestrated by Rudolph Giuliani, the former New York mayor and Trump's personal lawyer and adviser.

In what Georgia Public Broadcasting **called** "a series of fantastical claims and statements from various and sundry people touted as experts", Giuliani led the way in falsely claiming that the state's voting machines were rigged, thousands of votes were illegally cast, and suitcases of fake ballots were used to tilt the count in favour of Biden.

Giuliani also urged the Georgia legislature to create the slate of fake electors, providing a direct link between what prosecutors are expected to portray as a criminal attempt to steal the election and Trump. At the same time, Giuliani led a blitz of legal challenges to the election result in courts across the country, all of which failed.

Kohrs **said** that when Giuliani appeared before the grand jury he invoked attorney-client privilege to avoid answering many questions.

Another Trump lawyer, John Eastman, was called as a witness to a plan to pressure the then vice-president, Mike Pence, to block the declaration of Biden's win by Congress. The grand jury also called Sidney Powell, a Trump lawyer and conspiracy theorist **who pushed false allegations that voting machines were rigged** for which Fox News **paid** nearly \$800m to settle a defamation suit.

Several witnesses tried to avoid testifying. Senator Lindsey Graham went all the way to the US supreme court in a failed attempt to avoid appearing. Trump's former national security adviser, Michael Flynn, who attended meetings about invoking martial law and seizing voting machines, had to be ordered by a Florida judge to answer the grand jury's questions.

Carlson said that a parade of Republican witnesses, reluctant or willing, could prove very damaging to Trump.

"As a prosecutor, if you can call witnesses who were close to the crown, so to speak, that impresses the jury," he said.

"What happens very, very frequently, especially in a mob case, is they'll give immunity to one of the lower-echelon people to testify against the big boss. He doesn't want to do it, but he's got immunity and if he continues to resist, he can be held in contempt of court. Whether they want to do it willingly, or whether they are forced to do it under a grant of immunity, Willis is building a case that has a host of witnesses."

Eisen said the Georgia case is likely to be all the stronger for being largely built around the evidence of other Republicans.



Many of the key witnesses against Trump in the Georgia case will be his fellow Republicans. Photograph: Marco Bello/Reuters

“The fact that his overtures were rejected by staunch Republican officials, Brad Raffensperger, the secretary of state, Brian Kemp, the governor, makes a difference. Just the sheer weight of the evidence of election interference in Georgia is material. The Georgia case is a very powerful one, the most powerful we’ve seen to date,” he said.

Meanwhile, the [special counsel](#) appointed by the US justice department, Jack Smith, is conducting two criminal investigations involving Trump that again draw in Republicans whose testimony could be condemn the former president.

The New York Times [reported](#) earlier this month that investigators probing Trump’s mishandling of classified documents have won the cooperation of someone who worked for him at his Mar-a-Lago mansion in Florida.

Like Willis, the justice department is using subpoenas to force grand jury testimony from those who witnessed Trump’s actions including whether he had classified documents moved in order to hide them once it became known they were illegally stored in Florida.

Again, Trump’s team has dismissed the investigation as a “politically motivated witch-hunt” aimed at keeping him from returning to the White House. But the former president didn’t help himself at the CNN town hall when he undercut his own lawyers by claiming that he had “every right” to take the documents from the White House.

“I didn’t make a secret of it,” he said.

So will Trump be a convicted criminal by the time of the presidential election in November 2024?

“That is entirely possible,” said Eisen. “It’s also possible that with court delays and appeals, he may not face incarceration until after the next election. But what matters is that the charges are being brought. And that cues the issue up for the jury of the American people in the primaries and then in the general election.”

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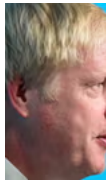
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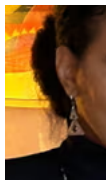
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