

# The FBI's unprecedented Mar-a-Lago raid may energize support for Trump among the Republican base



*In an unprecedented move last night, FBI agents raided Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, searching for classified documents that the former president may have illegally taken after leaving the White House. In this Q&A, [Thomas Gift](#) explains why the raid matters, what the response has been from Trump and his supporters, and the potential implications for the 2022 midterms.*

## Why is this raid important? Is it really unprecedented?

There's still much we don't know yet about the legal basis for the Mar-a-Lago raid, which saw FBI agents search Trump's estate without warning. While that can be unsatisfying, especially in a story as significant and fast-moving as this one, there's reason to be cautious in making too many early judgments. But certainly, this move is [unprecedented](#). It would be the first time in US history that a former president was subject to an FBI raid, led by the Justice Department of his White House successor (and potentially future political opponent). For one thing, we just haven't seen any ex-president who's been accused of so many instances of riding roughshod over the law, with the apparent relevant allegation of [mishandling classified documents](#). Additionally, there's always been a strong norm in the US against prosecuting former leaders because of the precedent that it would set and the political fury that it would provoke. One point is clear: The Department of Justice wouldn't have taken this step lightly.

## What's the Republican response been so far?

The MAGAverse of Trump and his supporters has been out in full force since the raid was announced. In a strident statement, Trump [called](#) the search "prosecutorial misconduct" and decried the "weaponization of the Justice System." That narrative has been [echoed](#) by other Republican politicians and on conservative media outlets like *Fox News* and *Newsmax*. Essentially, Trump backers are characterizing the raid as another political witch hunt—much like "[Russiagate](#)" and the [probe over Trump's July 25th phone call with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky](#)—aimed at taking down Joe Biden's most likely 2024 opponent. And it's not just coming from die-hard right-wingers. We're also hearing anger and demands for accountability from Republicans — like [Florida Senator Marco Rubio](#) — who in the past have been more critical of Trump. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy has even made [not-so-veiled threats](#) that, if Republicans take back control of the House after the midterms, anyone involved in the raid will be subject to investigations.

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Thomas Gift of UCL writes that the FBI's unprecedented Mar-a-Lago raid may energize support for Trump among the Republican base.

[blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog)



*“Marine One at Mar-a-Lago” (Public Domain) by [The Trump White House Archived](#)*

## What are the broader political consequences of the raid?

The Justice Department has a responsibility to bring wrongdoers to justice, and the former president isn’t above the law. At the same time, the decision to raid Trump’s home obviously has huge political ramifications, and the path from here on out is strewn with potential landmines. All of this seems unavoidable. Many members of the January 6th committee have [suggested](#) that they’d like to see Trump indicted for his role in the Capitol insurrection and for attempting to overturn the 2020 election results. What we’re seeing play out here is a harbinger of how just toxic the political environment could get if that happens. All bets are off, and it’s hard to know exactly the political tsunami that would break should the Attorney General Merrick Garland pursue that agenda. The bottom line: If we think America is polarized now, just imagine how divided it could get if this raid is the start of a full-fledged prosecution of Trump. The prospect of that unfolding while Trump is running for president in 2024 would only add to the explosiveness of the political controversy.

## What will the implications be for November’s midterms?

Even if federal agents find material evidence against Trump, it’s hard to envision the FBI raid not unleashing the full fury of MAGA voters. In terms of the elections, that could have two implications. The first relates to which Republican candidates make it through the primaries. Already, MAGA Republicans have had [considerable success](#) in securing their party’s nominations. In the remaining primaries, right-wing candidates will leverage what happened at Mar-a-Lago to further energize and build support among the conservative base. That’s likely to be effective because primary voters tend to lean more Trumpian. The consequences for the general election, by contrast, seem less clear. The worst-case scenario for Democrats, however, is that Republicans marshal the Mar-a-Lago raid to initiate a maelstrom of anti-Biden energy by [making Trump a martyr](#). The more Republicans are told that the White House is corrupt and out to take down Trump, the greater strength of the backlash we can probably expect in the form of increased GOP turnout.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of USAPP – American Politics and Policy, nor the London School of Economics.*

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