

# Trump's Justice Department targets TV networks for protesting press ban

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Trump's Department of Justice (DOJ) is investigating five major television networks for temporarily suspending White House pool coverage in protest against the exclusion of CNN, MS NOW and Politico last month. The investigation marks a further escalation in the administration's campaign to subordinate the press to a presidential dictatorship.

The department confirmed the investigation on Saturday, October 10. ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC and Fox News are being targeted over their collective response to Trump's press ban last month. NBC News reported that the department issued civil investigative demands on Friday, October 9. These are demands for information in a civil investigation, not criminal charges.

The television pool is a longstanding arrangement under which the five networks rotate responsibility for filming presidential events and distribute the footage to other news organizations. It allows outlets to share the expense of coverage and report from events where space is limited.

The administration is invoking antitrust law to attack this temporary act of solidarity. A DOJ spokesperson told Reuters: "Group boycotts among commercial competitors can violate the Sherman Act."

The investigation is blatantly unconstitutional. The Supreme Court recognizes constitutional protection for peaceful political boycotts while permitting antitrust enforcement against agreements aimed at securing economic advantage by restricting competition.

The networks suspended their coverage in response to Trump's attacks on their corporate colleagues, not for monetary benefits. No evidence has been provided that establishes a price-fixing arrangement or an effort to exclude a commercial competitor. The administration is attempting to turn any resistance to its attack on press freedom into grounds for another investigation.

Trump announced the exclusion of CNN, MS NOW and Politico in September after denouncing their coverage as "fake news."

"And when you look at Politico," Trump said last month,

"the stories they wrote are fake. So there's a lot of news and there may be others to join them, and maybe they can get better. But our country has to have honest news."

When CNN was prevented from carrying out its scheduled pool duties, the other participating networks suspended the shared coverage. The stoppage was already underway before the subsequent dispute over access to the state dinner for Chinese President Xi Jinping.

After US District Judge Timothy Kelly ordered the restoration of press credentials, the White House continued restricting access. At the state dinner, CNN was permitted to send technical personnel but excluded from sending its reporter and producer.

The fascist in the White House regards any coverage that does not repeat his lies as attacks on him personally. This extends to obsequious outlets such as Fox News whenever it departs from the role of a campaign organ.

In an October 6 Truth Social post Trump denounced Fox for interviewing Michigan Democratic Senate candidate Abdul El-Sayed and complained: "They don't show my record breaking Rallies the morning after, but others do, and that's what MAGA is watching." In another post, he attacked Fox for interviewing Nebraska Senate candidate Dan Osborn, asking: "Why are they doing this???"

For Trump and the ruling class, the media exists to promote him and his allies while denying airtime to their opponents.

The coercion is already shaping editorial decisions. At an October 6 hearing over the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) early review of ABC station licenses, network attorney Beth Wilkinson described the threat in blunt terms. "We sit with our head on the guillotine," she said, according to Politico. "We are watching everything we do." Courthouse News separately reported her warning that the process had already forced changes in ABC's editorial decisions.

The government does not need to prevail in court for the investigations to succeed. The threat of losing licenses can

influence coverage throughout a prolonged proceeding, especially when corporate executives subordinate journalism to their other business interests.

FCC Chairman Brendan Carr demonstrated this method during the attack on Jimmy Kimmel in September 2025. Carr threatened regulatory action, and ABC suspended the comedian's program, only restoring it after widespread public opposition.

At CBS, the cancellation of Stephen Colbert's late-night program was announced in July 2025 as Paramount sought approval for its merger with Skydance. His final broadcast aired in May 2026. The cancellation followed Paramount's agreement to pay \$16 million to settle Trump's lawsuit over the editing of a "60 Minutes" interview with Kamala Harris.

After taking control of Paramount through the Skydance Media merger, David Ellison installed Bari Weiss as editor-in-chief of CBS News in October 2025. The later acquisition of Warner Bros. Discovery, completed this October, extended the Ellison-led company's reach to CNN. The two transactions form successive stages in the concentration of media power among billionaires cultivating close relations with Trump.

ABC had also agreed to pay \$15 million toward Trump's presidential library to settle his lawsuit over George Stephanopoulos's characterization of the E. Jean Carroll civil verdict.

The Pentagon has pursued a parallel assault on the press. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth threatened journalists' credentials over "unauthorized" information gathering and drove established outlets to leave their Pentagon workspaces. A further requirement for official escorts obstructed reporters' access to military personnel. Litigation over the restrictions has continued.

These attacks are part of an international process. Under former Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, government influence over state media expanded while private outlets were closed or acquired by pro-government businessmen.

In Türkiye, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government has responded to a mounting financial scandal with another wave of censorship. Last month hundreds of X accounts were blocked in Türkiye including journalists, news outlets and a miners' union organizer.

The oligarchy's control over communications links these international attacks directly to American political life. The Associated Press reported Monday that Elon Musk had supplied more than \$276 million since July to support Republican efforts to retain Congress. Since taking over Twitter/X in 2022, Musk has transformed the platform into a right-wing cesspool where fascistic and racist content is encouraged and boosted by Musk himself.

Oracle, associated with billionaire Trump ally Larry

Ellison, is one of three managing investors in TikTok's new US joint venture. The Council on American-Islamic Relations, along with thousands of users, has accused the platform's new owners of suppressing posts critical of Israel, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Trump administration.

The censorship campaign extends to cultural performances. Anti-genocide rapper Macklemore was kicked off Ed Sheeran's tour following his pro-Palestinian statements which enraged billionaire stadium owner and Zionist Robert Kraft.

The immense concentration of wealth is incompatible with the defense of democratic rights. The billionaires' program of war, austerity and fascism is extremely unpopular. Trump's approval ratings are the lowest of his presidency while support for socialism exceeded 40 percent in the latest Gallup poll.

The Democratic Party offers no way forward. The Obama administration prosecuted Chelsea Manning for exposing US military crimes and pursued an investigation of WikiLeaks. The Trump administration subsequently brought the indictment against Julian Assange, including Espionage Act charges in 2019. These attacks developed across administrations and prepared the ground for the present offensive against what remains of the free press.

The defense of press freedom cannot be entrusted to media billionaires who bargain with the government over the terms of their own subordination. It requires the independent mobilization of the working class against the drive to dictatorship and the capitalist system that produces it. The major communications monopolies must be placed under public ownership and democratic workers' control, freeing access to information from the dictates of private profit and the state apparatus.



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