

# Trump's Authoritarian Playbook to Destroy Democracy in 2025

*When Trump declared he would only be a Dictator for the First Day in Office in 2025, this is the horrific plan he is ready to trigger:*

**Prelude:** [www.authoritarianplaybook2025.org/](http://www.authoritarianplaybook2025.org/)

Since Donald Trump's 2015 presidential announcement, confusion reigns in responding to his unconventional promises, repeatedly dismissed by media and influencers. Over eight years and a full term, Trump has consistently acted on extreme pledges, from a "Muslim ban" to election result rejection. Now, faced with more extreme promises like "terminating" the Constitution and becoming a "dictator," public uncertainty persists. Trump's threats continue to challenge democratic norms, emphasizing the imperative to take his declarations seriously and literally. The struggle to comprehend and respond endures, marking an unsettling pattern in American politics.

## Executive Summary



This report aims to alter these dynamics by clearly showing how Trump would follow through on his most extreme anti-democratic pledges for a second term and then offering expert recommendations for how to mitigate that danger.

The bulk of the report looks specifically at three things: **Promises, Powers, and Plans**.

- It collects a set of **promises** Donald Trump has made, in his own words, for what he would do in a second term. It places them in their proper context, coming amidst a resurgence of similar authoritarians worldwide that Trump has openly admired and modeled himself after.
- It examines the **powers** of the presidency and how they could be used to implement those promises. It explains the legal mechanisms that will be applied to turn Trump's campaign promises into government policy and programs. And, it assesses the previously available guardrails that could constrain or prevent these abuses of power and the extent to which they will still hold.
- It explores the **plans** Trump and his allies have drafted to circumvent or override the checks in our system that otherwise have or could restrain his most extreme intentions. Based on expert input, it describes how these policies will play out in practice and negatively impact American life upon implementation.

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In these ways, this report seeks to add to the growing body of reporting from outlets such as [The Atlantic](#) and [The New York Times](#) that have begun documenting what a second Trump term would look like. It also builds on prior work by Protect Democracy.

Protect Democracy previously issued [The Authoritarian Playbook](#), which provided a framework for understanding how modern strongmen around the world have consolidated power and subverted modern democracies. This report builds on that earlier one and places Trump's promises, powers, and plans in that context.

The ultimate assessment is a sobering one: As damaging as Trump's first term was to American systems of constitutional government, culminating in his efforts to overturn an election and violently halt the counting of electoral votes by Congress, what he has promised in his own words to do if returned to office would be even more destructive to our Republic.

Trump's campaign promises are extensive, as are the plans of groups working to support those promises in preparation for a second Trump term. This report, therefore, does not seek to cover them all. It also does not cover dangers posed by a second Trump term about which he has not made explicit promises or that fall outside of federal government operations, but that may pose even graver risks, such as the degree to which he uses the threat and reality of violence to achieve political ends. Those and other risks of a second Trump term also require attention, reporting, and analysis but are beyond the scope of this report. This report addresses the following topics on which he has made explicit promises and about which his allies have developed specific plans for federal government action:

- **Pardons to License Lawbreaking:** During Trump's first term, he discovered that he could leverage the pardon power to induce witnesses against him into silence. In a second term, he has indicated he would further abuse pardons to incite political violence, incentivize lawbreaking for his benefit, and render himself above the law.
- **Directing Investigations Against Critics and Rivals:** Retribution is the dominant theme of Trump's 2024 campaign, and his allies are making plans to eliminate the Department of Justice's traditional prosecutorial independence to give Trump greater personal control to direct law enforcement against his perceived opponents and insulate himself from accountability.
- **Regulatory Retaliation:** In addition to steering prosecutorial discretion via the Department of Justice, Trump has vowed to consolidate and wield federal regulatory power to reward political loyalty and punish his critics, particularly those associated with the media. There are numerous reports of this regulatory retaliation happening during Trump's first term, and plans for a second include ways of removing those obstacles that limited opportunities for more.
- **Federal Law Enforcement Overreach:** Trump's declaration that immigration is "poisoning the blood of our country" is a grim foreshadowing of how he will invoke the Alien Enemies Act, a wartime provision dating back to 1798. Once Trump has that power, he has also expressed his will to expand the footprint of federal law enforcement to police cities and shut down lawful protests.
- **Domestic Deployment of the Military:** A central hallmark of American democracy is that the U.S. military not be used against American citizens. But Trump plans to abuse the Insurrection Act to order military force to quash dissent and target vulnerable communities.

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The report also considers Trump's repeated flirtation with staying in office beyond a second term. When viewed in the context of the Authoritarian Playbook and the actions of Trump-like figures around the globe, this threat becomes hard to ignore.

This report is not all doom and gloom, though. Although Trump's first term battered our constitutional guardrails and the lives of many Americans, our democracy ultimately survived. As the report explains, that was no accident but the result of the courageous actions of a broad array of Americans and public leaders who stood up for our democracy. That work can provide both instruction and inspiration going forward.

Drawing from those lessons, the report ends with ten recommendations to prepare to protect American democracy against unconstitutional and authoritarian actions. As of the release date of this report, we are one year away from the next presidential inauguration.

**The time to act on these recommendations is now.** The recommendations include:

1. Create pro-democracy coalitions before the crisis arrives.
2. Take anti-democratic ideas and promises seriously.
3. Unite a broad pro-democracy movement against the acute, big-picture autocratic danger.
4. Support Republicans that stand firm for democratic institutions.
5. Rally around non-partisan, independent public servants.
6. Uphold the rule of law and democratic institutions, and always repudiate violence.
7. Protect the first targets, and arrange now to advocate for the most vulnerable.
8. Evaluate security at the community, household, and personal level.
9. Work to protect free and fair elections in 2026 and 2028.
10. Continue building the democracy of tomorrow.

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See [www.authoritarianplaybook2025.org/](http://www.authoritarianplaybook2025.org/) for details of the plan