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Americans are becoming increasingly violent toward judges, risking our democracy | Opinion

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By **Roberto Martinez**

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Threats to judges and their families are a growing danger to our democracy. The following is a sample of threats received recently by a highly respected federal judge after issuing a ruling:

- “These judges need to hang,”
- “A necktie party for treason,”
- “The entire family should suffer generations of hardship.”

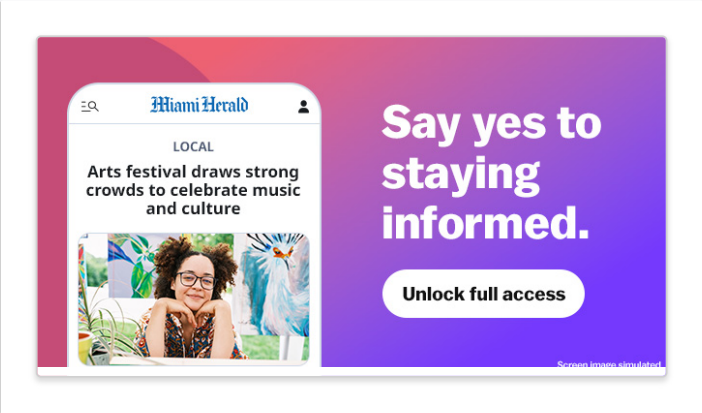
These threats do not discriminate along partisan lines; they target judges appointed by both political parties. And some of these threats lead to violence. Their objective is to erode the independence of the judiciary, undermining the rule of law.

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The Brennan Center for Justice at the NYU Law School, a nonpartisan law and policy institute, recently issued a report, "Protecting Judges from Rising Threats," based on interviews with sitting and retired judges. The report documents an escalating wave of threats and attacks targeting judges and their families.

The report should alarm all Americans. All of us rely on an independent federal judiciary to protect our constitutional democracy. That independence is essential to assure our constitutional rights are protected — from the right to speak freely to the right to a fair trial. And it is only a federal judge who can protect us when our government overreaches.



So, when judges are threatened or physically harmed because of their rulings, their independence and our freedoms are imperiled.

Here are some of the incidents documented in the report:

In 2020, a disgruntled lawyer posing as a FedEx delivery driver arrived at the home of New Jersey U.S. District Judge Esther Salas intending to assassinate her. When her son, Daniel, answered the door, the gunman shot and killed him and severely injured the judge's husband.

In 2022, a person traveled cross-country to assassinate Justice Brett Kavanaugh at his home, concerned he would vote to overrule Roe v. Wade. That person was convicted and sentenced to prison. As it turns out, she intended to kill three Justices.

In 2025, Justice Amy Coney Barrett experienced a pizza-doxing incident, and her sister was the target of a bomb threat. Pizza-doxing is a form of intimidation where an unknown person maliciously orders unsolicited pizzas to a target's private home to signal that their location is known.

The U.S. Marshals Service has documented nearly 27,000 threatening or harassing communications targeting judges from June 2015 to the fall of 2022.

According to the federal judiciary congressional budget summary released in March 2026, "security incidents of significant concern" increased for judges by 57% in fiscal year 2025.

Recent data from the U.S. Marshals Service shows 564 threats against federal judges in fiscal year 2025, and 347 threats against 266 different judges in fiscal year 2026 through mid-June. Judges at both the state and federal level also report swatting, misinformation campaigns and pizza-doxing.

Social media posts containing violent language or impeachment calls targeting judges surged 324% between May 2024 and March 2025.

All Americans have an obligation to protect our judges and their families. At a minimum, we need to advocate for sustained adequate funding for the security of our federal and state judges and their families. And we need to speak out against threats directed at the judiciary. Silence in the face of anger and hate can embolden violence.

It is fair and healthy in our constitutional democracy to disagree with and publicly debate judicial rulings. But that disagreement should never give rise to threats or violence on judges and their families.

Our democracy depends on an independent judiciary to uphold the rule of law. But for judges to do their jobs and serve that essential role, they must be free from threats to them and their families.

Roberto Martínez is a former U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Florida and a current partner at Miami-based law firm Colson Hicks Eidson.

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