



VICE News

Trump is making black Americans want to travel abroad more, business owners say

Five black-owned travel companies told VICE News they've seen an uptick in business since Donald Trump's surprise victory.

AM By Antonia Ibrida

2017-11-14 10:00 AM



At an annual sales meeting at the Fortune 500 company where she works, Claire Soares found herself face-to-face with a Trump supporter just before the inauguration. The white man at the overwhelmingly white meeting came right over to her and, out of the blue, shared his excitement about the upcoming ceremony.

To others, that admission may have sounded like regular office banter, but Soares felt targeted. As a black, female executive — and one of the few women of color present at the meeting — was it not obvious she wasn't excited about an election in which 94 percent of black women voted for Hillary Clinton?



Lucky for Soares, she can turn to her side-hustle for solidarity. She runs a travel company, called Up in the Air Life, that plans elaborate trips

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specifically for people of color, many of whom share her same feelings of political and social anxiety. In the wake of Trump's election, Soares said her trips have been selling out faster. She filled three international mega yachts in less than one week and found an "influx of people wanting to move abroad" seeking her advice.

Four other black-owned travel companies also told VICE News they've seen an uptick in business or interest in their services since Donald Trump's surprise victory. In the last year, in fact, African American travelers were more likely to travel abroad than the average person, according to a survey conducted by MMGY Global, one of the world's biggest hospitality and travel research firms.

"There's been a realization that has occurred with black people since Trump came to office," Soares explained, referencing white supremacist groups and sympathizers, some inside the White House. "We may have thought things were good, but I think we realize things are not as they seem. People that we thought were our friends and we cheer for, they are not really cheering for us."

While President Trump may have given the black travel industry an accidental boost, the market existed years before he ever came down an escalator with rock music blaring to announce his run for the White House. In the last several years, companies like Soares', led primarily by black women — Travel Noire, JetBlack, Black & Abroad, Women of Color Healing Retreat, to name just a few — have sought to help African Americans build safe spaces and connect with their heritage while traveling the globe.



Studies have suggested the travel industry's growth would plateau in 2018. But within the black travel community, that's not a concern. While 15 percent of all trips taken by Americans were international last year, 39 percent of trips taken by African Americans were international, according to MMGY's survey. And 40 percent of black travelers who went on international vacations intended to take another, compared to only 29 percent of American international travelers as a whole.

Kent Johnson, one of the co-founders of travel company Black & Abroad, a cultural collective aimed at encouraging black travel, said traffic to his business' website increased after November 2016.



"We saw an increase in people looking for safe spaces, looking for ways to be unapologetically themselves with the changing of the guard with this



minic in office right now," he said. "If you remember there were all these articles like, 'Where would you move if Trump got into office?'"

Jessica Nabongo, the CEO of JetBlack, a boutique travel firm that encourages travel to countries of the African diaspora, agreed that some of her clients are motivated to "escape given the current political climate," as she put it. From 2015 to 2017, for example, her firm saw a 300 percent increase in attendance on group trips, despite the fact her team had made fewer outreach efforts.

Cherrie Robinson, the CEO of Tastemakers Africa, which connects travelers with local insiders in African cities, saw an even bigger jump in subscribers since the start of the year: 935 percent. In addition, she found a 131 percent increase in requests for help moving to the continent of Africa.

"We believe it's a combination of weariness on the current state of the U.S. and a general sense that people are looking for things that are authentic right now," Cherrie said.

Surveys suggest that black Americans flock to black-owned travel firms because representation and familiarity are crucial. Eighty percent of black millennial travelers are more likely to plan trips to places they believe are accepting of their race and ethnicity, according to a 2017 survey from DigitasLBi, an international marketing and technology agency. And 50 percent of black millennials would pay more if the messaging around trip services was more relevant to their personal identity, while 38 percent said safety related to their race is one of the most important factors in their choice to book accommodations.

"Safety and how we'll be related to abroad are huge concerns. It was easier under Obama."

"The last couple of years, I've come to really feel extra unsafe with white people," said Rebecca Hall, a black professor from Salt Lake City who teaches a seminar on race and politics at the Women of Color Healing Retreat. "I think a lot of the contradictions and conflicts are so intense, and that being able to take a break outside of our country is a particularly poignant need right now." Organizers of the black women-only retreat in Costa Rica said that followers and trip sign-ups have increased rapidly in recent years but did not share internal data with VICE News.

The dynamic is not as simple as Trump single-handedly sending African-Americans running for the hills. There's been a larger culture of racial exclusion at play. Black travel firms said that their clients have long felt alienated by mainstream travel services failing to market to diverse audiences and stereotyping black people as unable to appreciate or afford worldly experiences.

"Safety and how we'll be related to abroad are huge concerns. It was easier under Obama," said Evita Robinson, founder of Nomadness Travel Tribe, one of the first travel and lifestyle brands to focus on black and brown travelers specifically.

In public presentations and conversations, Evita frequently reminds people of "The Negro Motorist Green Book," a travel guide that was crucial to the survival of African-American travelers during Jim Crow. The book helped African-Americans find friendly rest stops and lodging at a time when unabashed hostility and hatred put black travelers at physical risk. The black travel movement is a logical response to an industry that has systematically excluded black people, an industry in which travelers of color continue to report prejudice. Evita put it plainly: "Our representation matters, and right now you're all doing a piss-poor job of showcasing us."

"Fortunately, you can't be president for life in America, which is a good thing," said Christine Pannell, a black businesswoman from Chicago, who

...went on a healing retreat in Costa Rica. "But this is a tough season for a lot of people. So we're looking for coping mechanisms, you know, and ways to take care of ourselves, because we're not on the agenda."

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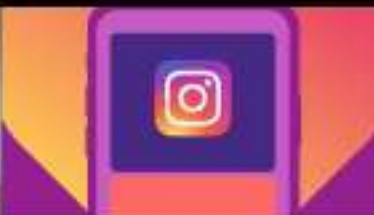
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Black Leaders Want Miami Beach Cops to Stop Using Pepper Balls and SWAT Teams on Spring Breakers

Just hours after Miami Beach enacted an 8 p.m. curfew for spring breakers to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, cops wasted no time enforcing it.

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A MAN IS WRESTLED OUT OF A CAR NEARS EAST CURFEW IN MIAMI BEACH, FLA., BY SUNSHINE, MARCH 21, 2021. (IMAGES: A. VASSILAKOPOULOS WORLD VIA AP)

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Just hours after Miami Beach enacted an 8 p.m. curfew for spring breakers to help prevent the spread of COVID-19, cops wasted no time enforcing it.

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By 9:30 p.m. on Saturday, the local police department had deployed SWAT teams to clear the streets with pepper balls, sound cannons, and military-style vehicles.

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Now, local Black leaders and legal advocates are concerned about the use of excessive force against the predominantly Black college students seen partying in the streets of the Florida vacation destination.

"I understand that people are angry that there are kids gathering together and partying. But Gov. Ron DeSantis has told the entire country that Florida is open for business." Stephen Hunter Johnson, the chair of the Miami-Dade County Black Affairs Advisory Board, told VICE News. "I firmly believe Black people are entitled to the same treatment as anyone else."

Florida has been open for business through most of the COVID-19 pandemic as DeSantis has opposed statewide lockdowns for nearly a year. Three weeks ago, in his State of the State address, he even bragged about how his state handled the pandemic, despite more than 32,000 virus-related deaths since last year.

In the past, city leaders had criticized people for gathering in large crowds and shut down festivities that grew too large. But on Saturday, the City of Miami Beach decided to take a different approach to the state's overall treatment of the pandemic. Officials voted to close down streets and impose penalties against Miami Beach tourists on the city's main commercial strip between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m.

Sunday night, Miami Beach Police reported they arrested at least 50 people and confiscated eight firearms. The Florida Justice Center tweeted that they'll be requesting a list of people arrested Saturday night in hopes of providing free legal assistance. The Florida Bail Fund did the same.



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BREAKING City of Miami Beach declares state of emergency and imposes curfew to control spring break crowds As Miami Police Shoots A Large Crowd With pepper balls to disperse the Crowds [#miami](#) [#MiamiBeach](#)



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The Miami Beach curfew isn't going so well





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Glendon Hall, the chairman of the Miami Beach Black Affairs Committee, doesn't think young spring breakers are being treated fairly either. He told the Miami Herald that he didn't see what led police to use force but that the crowds were mostly peaceful at first.

"The truck showed up and nobody knew why the truck was there," he told the outlet. "When we tried to calm things down, that hyped things up."

AP Photo/Chris Wedel



Alex Sain, the legal director for the Florida Justice Center, told VICE News that social media has played a huge part in pinning existing issues on the new crop of young Black tourists.

"The city of Miami Beach is essentially demonizing hundreds of thousands of people for the actions of a few," he said. "I'm not pretending these are not problems, but nothing at this point warrants pepper bullets. The things that are going viral here are essentially misdemeanors."

Miami Beach Mayor Dan Gelber, however, denied that police response had anything to do with race.

"We're not targeting a group of people; we're targeting conduct," Gelber told local news outlet WPXQ-Local 10. "We don't like these arrests because it endangers officers and arrestees who may be drunk or high and bystanders. The only option we have right now is to make sure we can control our streets."

Miami Police did not immediately respond to VICE News' requests for comment, but Police Chief Richard Clements told the Miami Herald that Saturday's police response would be reviewed internally.

The curfew was originally put into place for 72 hours, but on Sunday, Miami Beach city commissioners voted to leave the spring break protocol in place until April 12, according to local news outlets.

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AP Photo/Chris Wedel

Marjorie Taylor Greene Is Trolling the House

She's using tactical procedures doomed to fail to grind the Democrats' agenda to a halt. And Republicans are letting her.

By Paul Blumenthal

11.2.21   



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Marjorie Taylor Greene has a lot of free time since she was booted from her committee assignments last month. And she's spending it trying to slow down inevitable legislation she doesn't agree with.



On Wednesday, the Georgia freshman Republican made a motion to adjourn for the day, a tactical procedure she's deployed at least four times in recent weeks in an attempt to slow down the House's agenda, this time delaying the \$1.9 trillion COVID relief package on its way to passage Wednesday.

And despite growing frustration from some members of her party, Republican House leadership continues to turn the other cheek.

Speaking on the House floor Thursday, Greene—who lost her committee assignments after Facebook posts surfaced in which she endorsed violence—adjourn for the day, a tactical procedure she's deployed at least four times in recent weeks in an attempt to slow down the House's agenda, this time delaying the \$1.9 trillion COVID relief package on its way to passage Wednesday.

And despite growing frustration from some members of her party, Republican House leadership continues to turn the other cheek.

Speaking on the House floor Thursday, Greene—who lost her committee assignments after Facebook posts surfaced in which she endorsed violence—against high-profile politicians such as House Speaker Nancy Pelosi—said the COVID relief bill would “enslave the American people” in debt and called the bill “a waste of money and a complete waste of time.”

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She then asked for a motion to adjourn, which failed, and then a roll call vote on the motion to adjourn, which forces members to drop everything they're doing, including committee meetings, and return to the House floor to vote on whether to adjourn. That process can take an hour or so per bill.



The motion failed—as it always will, since Democrats control the House—and the bill is set to pass the House today, before heading to President Joe Biden's desk to be signed into law.

Forty House Republicans also went on the record against Greene's motion to adjourn. Last month, for example, Greene made a motion to adjourn in order to stop the passage of the Equality Act, which would codify protections for LGBTQ people into law.



"You could just vote 'no' instead of trying to get out of work early," Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez tweeted at Greene after she made the motion last month.



But it's not just high-profile Democratic priorities Greene is trying to mess with. Apparently even non-controversial bills that are usually taken up through unanimous consent or a voice vote are fair game to slow down the House. Greene had planned to stop more than a dozen such bills earlier this week, which forced House Democratic leadership to scramble and reschedule the vote. [CNN reported Monday](#).

"It's frustrating," Rep. Fred Upton, one of 10 House Republicans who voted to impeach former President Donald Trump in January, told CNN. "I don't see that this is resonating at home, the motions to adjourn. I mean it's just a pain. It's a pain in the ass."

Greene blasted the criticism last week. "Some GOP members complained to me that I messed up their schedule," she said in a tweet. "I'm not sorry for interrupting fundraising calls & breakfast."



House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy hasn't publicly commented on Greene's obstruction tactics, but a clear majority of Greene's fellow GOP members continue to back the motions. "It's time to make some changes, and until those changes start taking place we'll continue doing what we're doing," Rep. Jody Hice, a Georgia Republican, [told CNN](#).

Rep. Jim Jordan, a fellow member of the Freedom Caucus, blamed the Democrats for stripping Greene of her committee assignments and said this was all their fault.

"The Democrats are the ones who created that situation and that's ridiculous what they did. It's wrong what they did and now they're all upset that Marjorie's asking them to do their job. I don't have a problem with it," Jordan [told the Washington Post](#). "I walked on the floor when she made a motion to adjourn and I said, 'Marjorie, you're doing your committee work.'"





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VICE News

The Cop Who Killed George Floyd Goes on Trial Today. Anyone Can Watch It.

Here's everything you need to know about former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin's murder trial.

By Dana Claxton

4.8.21 Share Tweet Email



LEFT: GEORGE FLOYD; RIGHT: DEREK CHAUVIN

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When former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin kept his knee on George Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes, he set off a massive reckoning with what Americans are willing to accept from their police.

Now, Chauvin's trial, which begins Monday, will determine if that shift in mindset will also hold him accountable for murder. And the [world can watch it here.](#)

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"Anybody who has access to Court TV is going to have a front-row seat to this trial," Isabella Nascimento, a staff attorney for the Minnesota ACLU, told VICE News. "We will see what that will do and if that brings an additional level of accountability."

After Floyd died on May 25 under Chauvin's knee, the 39-year Minneapolis Police Department veteran saw swift consequences uncommon for law enforcement: Within four days of Floyd's death, he was fired, arrested, and charged with second-degree manslaughter and second-degree murder.

Now, Chauvin's trial, which begins Monday, will determine if that shift in mindset will also hold him accountable for murder. And the [world can watch it here](#).

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After Floyd died on May 25 under Chauvin's knee, the 39-year Minneapolis Police Department veteran saw swift consequences uncommon for law enforcement: Within four days of Floyd's death, he was fired, arrested, and charged with second-degree manslaughter and second-degree murder. He now faces [up to 50 years in prison](#) if found guilty.

But Chauvin's trial represents more than just punishment for one man. What happens will set the tone for whether policing in the U.S. will finally get reformed as millions have demanded—or if the status quo experienced by the Black community will prevail.

For his part, Chauvin maintains he did nothing wrong and followed procedure when he encountered the 46-year-old Black man after a local bodega owner reported him using a counterfeit \$20 bill. His defense also plans to use Floyd's underlying health conditions, including heart disease and his COVID-19 diagnosis, as well as the fentanyl in his system at the time, to cast doubt on the cause of his death, which medical examiners determined was homicide.

But the jury will also see police body-camera footage and cell phone video of Floyd's death, which went viral and further inflamed protests. They show Floyd crying "I can't breathe" more than 20 times while Chauvin dismisses his pleas.

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Despite the decades in prison facing Chauvin, some believe prosecutors should have gone harder on the former cop. Noted civil rights attorney [Benjamin Crump](#), who's representing Floyd's family, called on the state to charge Chauvin with first-degree, which would require proving that he planned to kill Floyd. The second-degree charges still include the intent to kill, just in the spur of the moment.

Either way, [murder charges](#) against police officers are incredibly rare—and convictions, even rarer.

"The defendants in this case will say this isn't about evidence or about justice. This is about the system being afraid of a bad outcome," Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison said in [an interview on the Netflix series 'Patriot Act'](#) last June. "I reject that 100 percent. I have not overcharged or undercharged in this case. We have charged those counts which we believe we can prove ethically."

Jury selection will officially start at 9 a.m. ET Monday at the Hennepin County Courthouse in downtown Minneapolis. Opening statements won't happen until three weeks later, on March 29, and officials expect the trial to last seven weeks.

Only one member of Chauvin's family and one member of Floyd's family will be allowed into the courtroom at a time.

The charges

Originally, Hennepin County prosecutors had charged Chauvin with third-degree murder, which meant that he didn't intend to kill Floyd. But after an outcry from the public and Floyd's family, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz transferred the case to the state attorney general, who bumped up the charges.

At one point shortly after Floyd's death, Chauvin nearly agreed to plead guilty to third-degree murder, the [New York Times](#) reported. That would have guaranteed he'd spend at least 10 years in prison. But at the last minute, former U.S. Attorney General William Barr intervened and quashed the deal over concerns that it would be seen as too lenient.

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Then, last October, a Hennepin County judge [dropped the charge](#), ruling that the third-degree charge didn't apply in the case because Chauvin hadn't put anyone besides Floyd in danger.

On May 25, the owner of a local convenience store called 911 and reported Floyd had paid him with counterfeit money. When police officers arrived, they handcuffed Floyd and began to put him in the back of the cruiser. But Floyd stiffened and said that he suffered from claustrophobia, according to court documents.

"Anybody who has access to Court TV is going to have a front-row seat to this trial. We will see what that will do and if that brings an additional level of accountability."

That's when Chauvin, who was called in as backup minutes prior, got involved in the arrest. The officers pulled Floyd to the ground. One officer restrained Floyd's legs with his knee and hands and another officer knelt on Floyd's back and held down his handcuffed wrist with his hands. Chauvin then applied his left knee to Floyd's neck as he lay face-down on the ground.

Floyd would spend the next nine minutes and 24 seconds, the final moments of his life, pleading with officers to let him up. He even called out to his deceased mother. The three other officers present did nothing to stop Chauvin. Body cameras—as well as bystanders' cell phones—were rolling as it unfolded.

APRIL 12, 2020



"You're doing a lot of talking, a lot of yelling," Chauvin can be heard saying on police body cameras, [according to court documents](#). "It takes a heck of a lot of oxygen to say things."

The three other officers present when Floyd died—J. Alexander Kueng, Thomas K. Lane, and Tuo Thao—will be tried separately from Chauvin, in August. They're all charged with aiding and abetting second-degree murder and manslaughter.

During Chauvin's trial, prosecutors will argue that he was culpable of negligence, showed disregard for human life, and took an unreasonable risk as a sworn officer when he used excessive force to restrain Floyd, [according to court documents](#). The state points out that the former officer didn't let up on the maneuver for minutes [even after Floyd became unresponsive](#).

Chauvin's murder charge carries up to 40 years in prison and the manslaughter charge, 10.

During the jury selection process, prosecutors are expected to ask potential jurors 14 key questions, according to [Minnesota NBC affiliate KARE-11](#). Among those is whether they've seen the footage of Floyd's death, and if so how many times. Attorneys will also reportedly ask whether someone close to them participated in demonstrations against Floyd's death last summer and whether they feel those protests had a positive or negative impact on the city of Minneapolis.

Chauvin's defense

While Chauvin's defense isn't entirely known just yet, his attorney Eric Nelson has given the public an idea in court filings.

In a filing from last August, Nelson argued that Chauvin used reasonable and authorized force when he pinned Floyd to the ground with his knee, according to the Washington Post. The filing cites part of an officer

training manual in use as recently as 2018 that demonstrates the maneuver Chauvin used. A former member of the Minneapolis Police Department, however, told the Minnesota Star Tribune that a different, more forgiving restraining technique has been taught to officers as recently as 2016.

APR 18/2019/11



"Once the [officer] is in control, then you release," Minneapolis Police Department veteran Mylan Masson told the publication last summer. "That's what use of force is: You use it till the threat has stopped."

The jury will consider two autopsies during the trial. The first is the Hennepin County medical examiner's, which concluded Floyd's death was a homicide and that he died after his heart failed while being restrained by police. The examiner also found that Floyd had hypertension, a sickle cell disease trait, COVID-19, and an amount of fentanyl in his bloodstream that has killed others. However, the medical examiner specifically notes that he isn't attributing Floyd's death to the drugs.

The second is a private autopsy commissioned by Floyd's family, which also determined Floyd's death was a homicide but placed the cause of death solely on the actions of the officers.

That's not stopping the defense from pointing to Floyd's drug use as a catalyst.

"Put simply, Mr. Floyd could not breathe because he had ingested a lethal dose of fentanyl and, possibly, a speedball. Combined with sickle cell trait, his pre-existing heart conditions, Mr. Floyd's use of fentanyl and methamphetamine most likely killed him," Nelson wrote in court documents filed last August. "Adding fentanyl and methamphetamine to Mr. Floyd's existing health issues was tantamount to lighting a fuse on a bomb."

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The defense has also introduced evidence of Floyd's alleged past drug use, alleging that Floyd admitted to using oxycodone daily during a trip to the hospital a year before his death. The defense team has also introduced his alleged connection to selling narcotics as recently as a year before, as well as a previous crime he'd been convicted of in Texas back in August 2007.

Barbed-wire and unscalable fences

The city of Minneapolis has been preparing for the high-profile trial in the weeks leading up to it. Protests are already planned for Monday, when jury selection begins.

Last month, Mayor Jacob Frey told reporters that the city will put 1,100

police officers from 12 different law enforcement agencies, as well as 2,000 members of the National Guard, around the county for the duration of the trial. The public safety plan draw criticism from the City Council, which argued such a heavy police presence could exacerbate the already tense relationship between law enforcement and the community.

The community at large has also been gearing up for the worst. The city has spent \$645,000 to fortify City Hall and the Hennepin County Courthouse with concrete barriers, barbed wire, and non-scalable fences in the event of civil unrest. Local businesses have also boarded up their windows and storefronts.

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OW By Goodfellow

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PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP LISTS WHILE IN A PHONE CALL WITH THE CHIEFS OF STATE AND SENATE, IN THE Oval Office of the White House, WASHINGTON, D.C., JULY 20, 2021. (AP PHOTO/ALAN KRAUSE)

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Anti-racketeering laws were originally written to take down the mob. Now, they're underpinning a criminal investigation of former President Donald Trump and his allies.

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PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP LISTENS WHILE IN A PHONE CALL WITH THE LEADERS OF SHOM HA ISRAEL, IN THE Oval Office of the White House, Friday, Oct. 23, 2020, in Washington. (AP Photo/Carol M. Highet)

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The [federal RICO statute](#)—designed in 1970 to help prosecute organized crime mob bosses for illicit deeds committed by their underlings—is widely seen as too complex and convoluted for most prosecutions. Yet key differences between federal RICO and Georgia's equivalent make the state's version more flexible and easier to apply, lawyers say.

Willis has her work cut out for her. For years, experienced criminal

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attorneys have rolled their eyes at anyone using the words "Trump" and "RICO" in the same sentence, saying non-lawyers have little idea how tricky it is to meet the elaborate requirements for building such a case.

But Willis happens to be a Georgia RICO expert. Before the Trump investigation, she was best known for bringing a novel and high-profile racketeering case against teachers in Atlanta accused of organized cheating.

"RICO became kind of a joke among lawyers, because everyone thinks it's RICO, and it's never actually RICO," said Ryan Locke, a former public defender in Georgia. But this time, he said, "I think it's legit."

A Trump spokesperson dismissed the idea that Trump did anything wrong and accused Willis of engaging in a transparent attempt to harass Trump.

"This is simply the Democrats' latest attempt to score political points by continuing their witch hunt against President Trump, and everybody sees through it," spokesman Jason Miller told VICE News.

Georgia RICO

Willis is investigating efforts by Trump and his allies to find ways to flip the state from a loss into a victory for Trump, after President Joe Biden carried Georgia by just 11,779 votes. On January 3, Trump called Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger and urged him to help Trump "find" enough votes to win.

The call, which included Trump, Raffensperger, Trump's White House chief of staff Mark Meadows, and multiple lawyers, was tape-recorded and then leaked to the media, including the Washington Post.

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"All I want to do is this," Trump told Raffensperger, "I just want to find 11,780 votes, which is one more than we have, because we won the state."

Trump reportedly also placed calls to Georgia's governor, Brian Kemp, to pressure him to convince state legislators to overturn the state's result, and to the state's attorney general, Chris Carr, in which Trump reportedly warned Carr not to interfere with legal attempts to secure Trump's victory.

Willis' probe will also scrutinize a phone call placed by Trump ally Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham to Raffensperger about ballot signature verification procedures, the Washington Post reported. Raffensperger told the Post that Graham appeared to be asking him to find ways to toss out legal ballots. Graham disputed that claim as "ridiculous."

To land a RICO case, prosecutors would need to show multiple criminal acts that were all undertaken in furtherance of the same goal, Locke said.

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"RICO really comes into play in a case where someone commits a number of crimes that all lead toward one common corrupt aim," Locke said.

The original federal RICO statute was designed to make mob bosses accountable for crimes they ordered someone else to do, by letting prosecutors brand the entire organization as an ongoing criminal enterprise. After the federal law was passed, 33 states followed suit with their own versions. Since then, the applications of Georgia's RICO law have expanded beyond traditional organized criminal networks.

"I always tell people when they hear the word racketeering, they think of 'The Godfather,'" Willis told the Times. But the law can also be applied to different types of organizations besides the mafia, she said, including otherwise legitimate entities used toward illegitimate ends. "If you have various overt acts for an illegal purpose, I think you can—you may—get there."

"The scope of its reach has now grown so that anyone who commits two or more proscribed crimes within a 10-year period in furtherance of an ongoing enterprise can find themselves charged with a RICO violation," according to a description of the statute written by Georgia defense lawyer Tanva Miller.

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Willis hasn't explicitly laid out a theory of the case. But she told the Times that racketeering could apply to anyone who uses a legal entity, such as a government agency or a public office, in pursuit of breaking the law.

Technically speaking, she'd need to find two separate crimes to make a broader racketeering charge stick. But if she does, then the Georgia RICO statute carries a hefty prison sentence of between 5 and 20 years.

Before becoming DA in January, Willis was best known for leading a racketeering case against 12 public school teachers in Atlanta accused of falsifying their students' scores on standardized tests to improve their schools' standing. She argued that the teachers violated Georgia's RICO