



Q Search the web

Top Stories Printer paper, sanitizer escape Long COVID comeback COVID vaccine effectiveness Massi



Pam Bondi reshapes the DOJ around Trump's priorities

Ken Dilanian

Fri, March 14, 2025 at 1:39 PM EDT

14 min read



64

Unfortunately, this video is not available in your region.

Error Code: 100-202

Session Id: zyng5zim (Pls: 1fa3bdd8-97be-49fd-8437-271bd9b72cab)

President Donald Trump's choice of Pam Bondi to be attorney general last fall prompted sighs of relief in some Democratic and legal circles.

Trump's first pick, then-Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., who had been investigated by the Justice Department in connection with allegations of sex trafficking — he denied the allegations and the DOJ decided not to bring charges — was seen as

someone chosen because he would do whatever Trump asked, regardless of the ethics or law.

Bondi was seen as a professional with deep legal experience: she had served as Florida's attorney general for 10 years. It was true that she had served as one of Trump's lawyers during his first impeachment trial, and supported his conspiracy theories about the 2020 election. Still, Democrats and Republicans who knew her believed she was someone who'd stand up to Trump in a way Gaetz wouldn't and refuse if the president asked her to do anything illegal or improper.

ADVERTISEMENT

But since Bondi took the reins, the Justice Department has been operating in a manner dramatically at odds with how it has been run in the 50 years since Attorney General John Mitchell was sent to prison for his role in the Watergate scandal.

Vowing to end the politicization she says occurred during the Biden administration, Bondi has implemented her own regime of politicization, critics say. The Trump administration, with Bondi's help, appears to be seeking to transform the Justice Department into a political instrument of the president — something that no Republican or Democratic administration has done since then-President Richard Nixon.

"The Justice Department is not independent of the President of the United States," said Mike Davis, a lawyer and Republican activist who has advised Trump on DOJ issues and who said Bondi was doing exactly what Trump had promised. "Every federal prosecutor and agent reports to the deputy attorney general, who reports to the attorney general, who reports to the president, who is elected by all Americans. Anyone who thinks otherwise proves that the Deep State is not a conspiracy theory."

"President Trump is doing the unthinkable in Washington — he's doing what he promised voters he would do and Pam Bondi is helping," he said. "She's done more in a month than the last several attorneys general did in years."

ADVERTISEMENT

In her first month in office, Bondi has presided over a purge of career Justice Department lawyers who are supposed to be protected under civil service rules but who were fired or reassigned without explanation, current and former officials told NBC News. She also backed her department's push to dismiss corruption charges against New York City Mayor Eric Adams so he could help with immigration enforcement, which prompted the largest wave of resignations by career prosecutors since Watergate. And she has remained silent as Ed Martin, acting U.S. attorney in Washington, D.C., has threatened [Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., Georgetown University](#) and others over politics. She has also openly promised to fire DOJ civil servants herself if they "despise" Trump. Experts say that is [prohibited](#) under federal law.

"These firings seem designed to make room for someone who is a political loyalist, someone who will do the White House's bidding, in an effort to reshape the department into something that it has never been before," a senior career Justice Department official said on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

Bondi has also spoken in nakedly partisan terms in six appearances on Fox News, her only news media interviews.

In an interview with Sean Hannity, she said she was appalled when she discovered on her first day as attorney general the portraits of former President Joe Biden, former Vice President Kamala Harris and her own predecessor, Merrick Garland, still hanging in the secure areas of the National Security Division's 7th floor offices in the Justice Department's headquarters.

ADVERTISEMENT

"That's how bad it was," she [told](#) Hannity. "So I personally took those off the wall. But that's the tip of the iceberg."

Bondi told Hannity she planned to "root out" Justice Department employees "who despise Donald Trump," and "they will no longer be employed."

White House spokesman Harrison Fields disputed that Trump was trying to seize control of the Justice Department, saying in a statement, "President Trump cannot be more clear in stating that his Department of Justice will act independently of the White House and any assertion otherwise is a lie."

But that is at odds with how Trump has viewed and related to the Justice Department in the past. It's also at odds with how many of his allies and supporters in the legal sphere see things.

ADVERTISEMENT

Bondi declined a request for an interview but said in a statement to NBC News: "This Department of Justice is focused on making America safe again, which includes prosecuting violent criminals, illegal aliens, and dangerous cartel and gang members which the previous administration ignored. The Department and its resources are being used to uphold the rule of law and ensure there is one tier of justice for all Americans."

Outside of television studios, Bondi has rarely been seen in public as attorney general. She appeared in photos alongside other senior national security officials — posted on X by FBI Director Kash Patel — wearing a camouflage FBI ballcap and windbreaker at Dulles Airport when an accused terrorist extradited from Pakistan landed in the United States.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, three Justice Department officials who work in different parts of the agency said Bondi has not been a visible presence in DOJ offices.

"Garland sent a positive note to DOJ upon arriving," one of the officials said. "By contrast, she went on talk shows about all the corruption she claims to have found in DOJ and FBI."

ADVERTISEMENT

The official said typically people at the Justice Department headquarters would see some public presence from a new attorney general, like appearances in the

building's Great Hall. Instead, he said, the headquarters feels "like a ghost town."

That is slated to change Friday, when Trump is expected to give a speech in the building — a building where, just months ago, prosecutors were working to try to put him in prison.

A shaky start and a dramatic shift

Just days after her swearing in, Bondi stepped up to the podium in the Justice Department's seventh floor conference room for her first news conference as attorney general. Behind her stood federal agents in black jackets emblazoned with "FBI" and "ATF Police" and "DEA." Next to her was a woman whose daughter had been murdered by an illegal immigrant.

"We're here today because we have filed charges against the state of New York. We have filed charges against Kathy Hochul," she opened. "This is a new DOJ, and we are taking steps to protect Americans."

ADVERTISEMENT

Reporters arrayed in chairs in front of her looked up in surprise. Did Bondi mean *criminal* charges? Was the governor of New York about to be arrested?

It quickly became clear she was talking about a civil lawsuit, not a criminal complaint. The Justice Department was suing New York over policies it says impede immigration enforcement. No one was going to jail.



Attorney General Pam Bondi, during a news conference at the Justice Department in Washington, D.C., on Feb. 12.

It was a small verbal misstep, but one that [some observers](#) saw as indicative of an attorney general not in command of her material.

Bondi's larger message that day, however, came through loud and clear. The Justice Department would take action against state and local governments that follow so-called "sanctuary" policies restricting how local law enforcement can cooperate with federal immigration authorities.

ADVERTISEMENT

It was no accident that Bondi's first news conference was about immigration. On her first day in office, she issued a series of orders that amounted to a sea change in the Justice Department's priorities. She disbanded a task force focusing on seizing money from Russian oligarchs and an FBI effort to counter foreign influence operations on social media.

She pared back the enforcement of the Foreign Agents Registration Act and other laws governing whether U.S. corporations can pay bribes overseas.

The orders largely underscored a theme. Many of the programs being eliminated or downgraded were ones that Trump and his allies said had been improperly used to investigate them. Instead, the Justice Department would now prioritize the enforcement of immigration law and the war against Mexican drug cartels that import fentanyl.

In recent weeks, more memos from the Justice Department's senior leaders, obtained by NBC News, have instructed federal prosecutors to charge immigration offenses whenever they can, and elements of the FBI and the DOJ, including those devoted to fighting terrorism and organized crime, have been repurposed to target illegal immigrants and drug cartels.

ADVERTISEMENT

Bondi aides have been pointing multiple media outlets, including NBC News, to a series of what they view as significant accomplishments achieved by the Justice Department since Trump took office.

Their list includes the arrest and transfer from Pakistan of a man alleged to have helped kill 13 service members in the Abbey Gate terrorist attack; the move by Mexico to hand over 29 drug cartel figures, including a kingpin accused of orchestrating the murder of a Drug Enforcement Administration agent; threats of federal lawsuits against states over the issue of transgender women playing women's sports; ending lawsuits begun under Biden that Bondi viewed as supporting racially discriminatory policies; and launching a federal task force advertised as combatting antisemitism at universities.

But a major change in law enforcement priorities and emphasis when a new president takes office in itself is neither unusual nor unexpected.

Administrations have long set policy priorities for the Justice Department that change from president to president, and Trump got elected after promising to crack down on immigration and the drug cartels.

What is dramatic and unprecedented about Trump's second crack at overseeing the Justice Department is the extent of the effort to shape the career workforce into one seen as more willing to do the president's bidding.

ADVERTISEMENT

The overwhelming majority of the roughly 100,000 people who work at the Justice Department, the FBI and other agencies the DOJ oversees are not appointed by the president. They are career civil servants hired under federal rules that are supposed to offer them a measure of protection from politically motivated actions against them.

Days after Trump took office, at least a dozen of the most senior public servants at the department were [removed](#) from their jobs in the national security and criminal divisions, actions not taken by other post-Watergate administrations. They were offered jobs in a working group tasked with taking action against sanctuary cities. Some took them, some left.

The Justice Department also quickly [fired](#) several prosecutors who had worked on the criminal investigations of Trump, while making no allegation that they did anything improper. [Many experts](#) say the firings were illegal, but many of the lawyers have opted to move on with their lives rather than challenge them. This past Friday, several other career leaders in the department were reassigned, including top lawyers in the national security division, the head of the office that investigates lawyer misconduct, and the pardon attorney, current and former officials said.

On Tuesday, NBC News [broke the news](#) that the Justice Department was sharply downsizing the Public Integrity Section, which for decades has focused on prosecuting political corruption and was involved in the cases against Trump. Prosecutors in the unit, which had employed dozens of people, were being told to take details to other positions within the department.

Bondi has yet to fill some of the key roles opened up in this purge. Officials say the national security division in particular is bereft of senior leaders. But several Justice Department officials said the widespread understanding within the agency is that people sympathetic to Trump's politics are being elevated to senior jobs.

One official said he had seen an example of that happening. This official noticed a rank-and-file lawyer in the department who is a Trump supporter suddenly stopped coming to work, saying he was on special assignment in the deputy attorney general's office. A few weeks later, that lawyer was leading the criminal division at a major U.S. attorney's office.

Not the president's lawyer

This has not happened before. Over the last five decades, the Justice Department adopted policies and norms designed to keep the institution protected from political pressure from the president.

Among those policies was one limiting who from the White House could speak to people in the Justice Department. Garland was so concerned about distancing himself from the White House that he tried to avoid even being in the same room with Biden, who by some accounts [grew angry](#) about how Garland handled the investigation of his son, Hunter Biden.

Attorneys general of both parties have sought to emphasize that they are not the president's lawyer — they represent the people of the United States.

Bondi, by contrast, has boasted in her Fox News appearances about her close relationship with Trump and her pride in being a member of a team that carries out his wishes.

"We all have known each other, the majority of us, for so long, and we're friends, and that's what makes a difference," she [told](#) Fox News host Jesse Watters. "That's why we're getting things done so fast for Donald Trump and to make America great again."

Bondi also boasted to Hannity about the firing of prosecutors who worked on criminal prosecutions of Trump for special counsel Jack Smith, many of whom had long and distinguished Justice Department careers.

"The Jack Smith team, gone," she told Hannity. "That was low hanging fruit. Get rid of them, get rid of the people that raided Mar a Lago."

Trump allies who have spoken publicly — including Davis — say the purges are justified and necessary because the Justice Department and the FBI were hijacked by closet Democrats, who worked closely with the Biden White House to target Trump for prosecution when the evidence didn't merit it.

A Justice Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity, added that leaders did not believe lawyers who spent years trying to put the president in prison could be trusted to carry out his agenda.

Bondi has articulated that view herself, repeatedly decrying what she called the "weaponization" of the Justice Department in the last administration.

"They targeted Donald Trump," she said during her confirmation hearing. "They went after him. Actually, starting back in 2016, they targeted his campaign. They have launched countless investigations against him. That will not be the case if I am attorney general."

But Bondi and other Trump supporters have not offered any evidence to support the claim that career FBI and Justice Department officials investigated and prosecuted alleged crimes by Trump involving classified documents and January 6th in order to damage him politically. They have dismissed statements by Smith and other prosecutors that they honestly believed Trump broke the law by refusing to return classified documents and spreading a false narrative about 2020 election fraud that helped spark the storming of the U.S. Capitol.

Shortly after taking office, Bondi announced a "weaponization working group," designed to review the Trump prosecutions. That group likely now has access to every text, email and memo Smith and his team wrote on government computers and phones. If they have found any evidence of wrongdoing or bias, critics say, they should make it public.

Dave Aronsberg, a Democrat who until January was district attorney of Palm Beach County and worked closely with Bondi over the years, was among those who expressed relief when Trump named her attorney general. Aronsberg told NBC News this week that he still believes Bondi will stand up to the president if he asked her to do something illegal.

“She is loyal to Trump,” he said, but “I still don’t believe that she will prosecute Trump’s enemies for political reasons. That’s where she differs from Matt Gaetz others who might have taken the job.”

This article was originally published on [NBCNews.com](https://www.nbcnews.com)

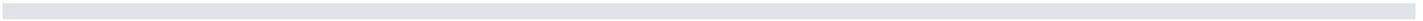
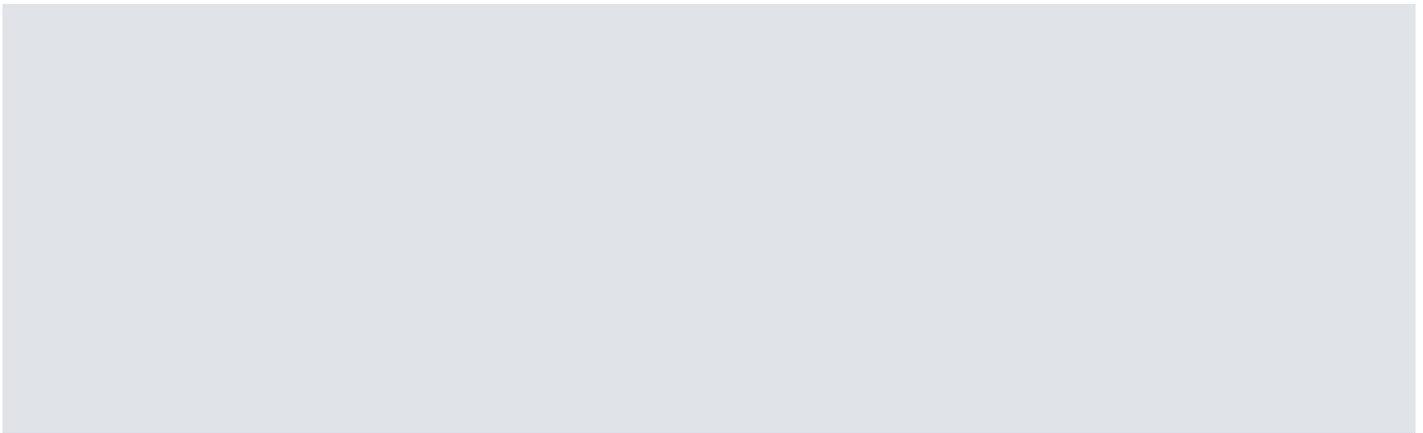
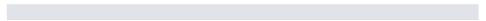
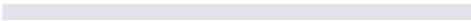
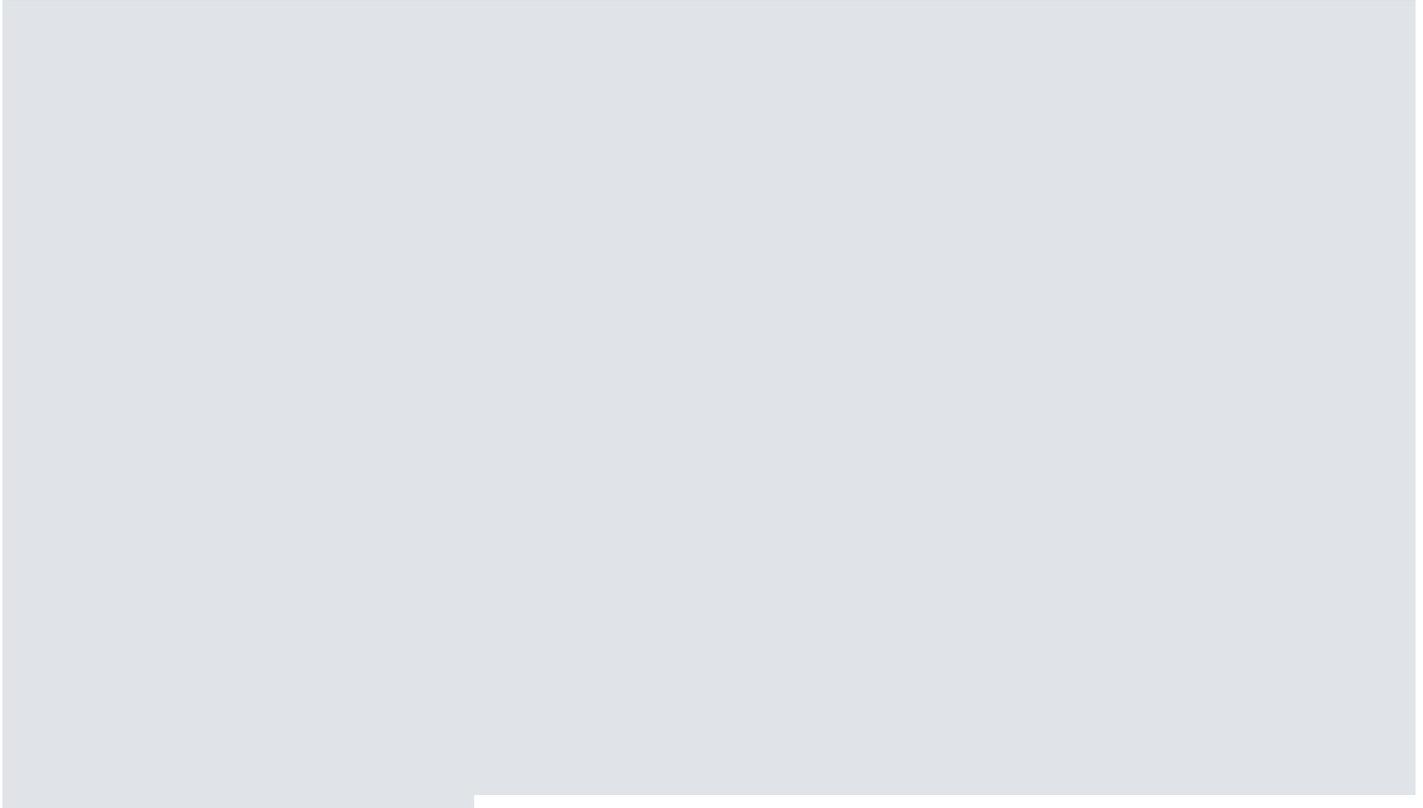
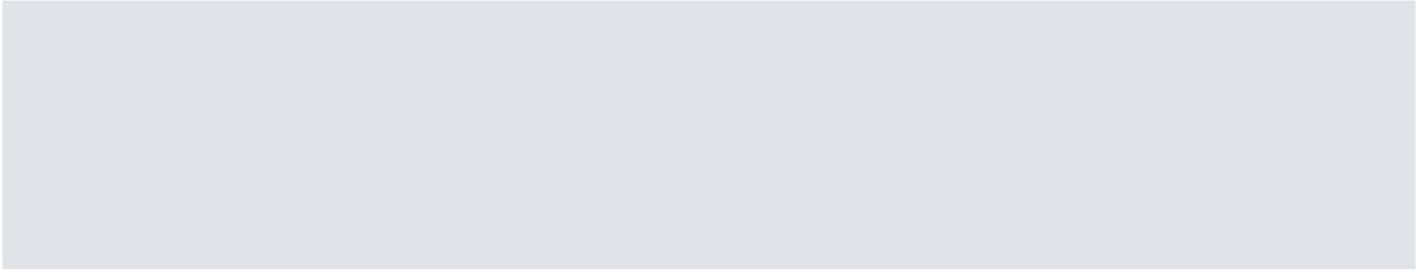
 **View comments (64)**

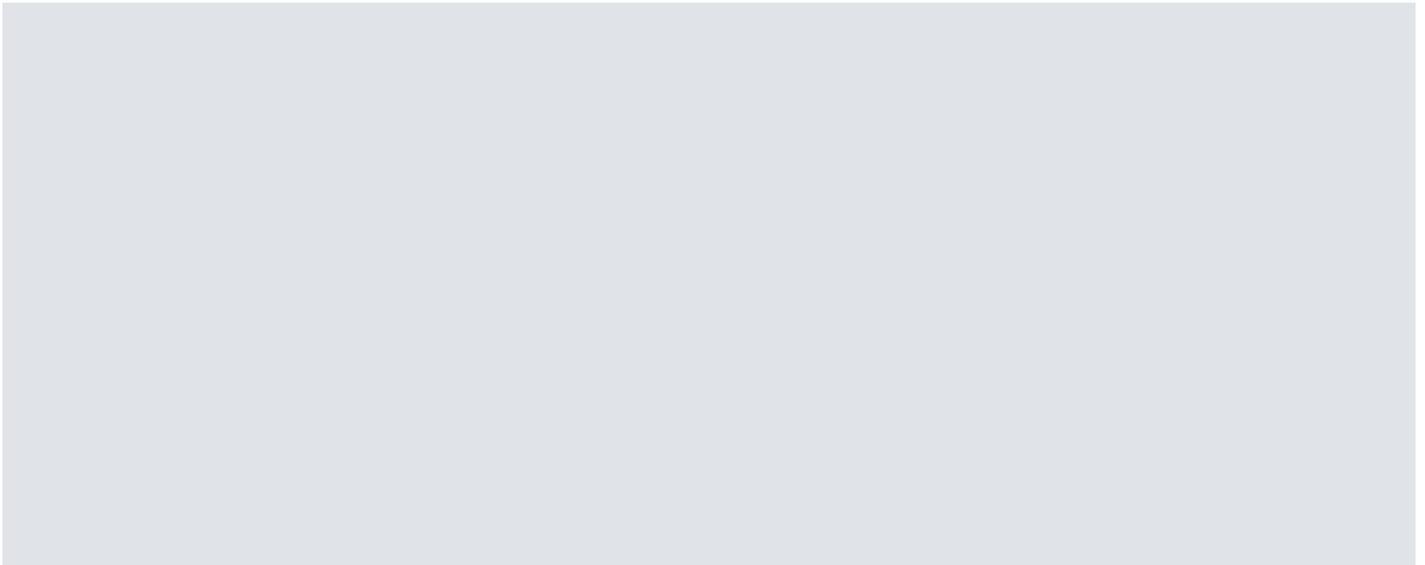
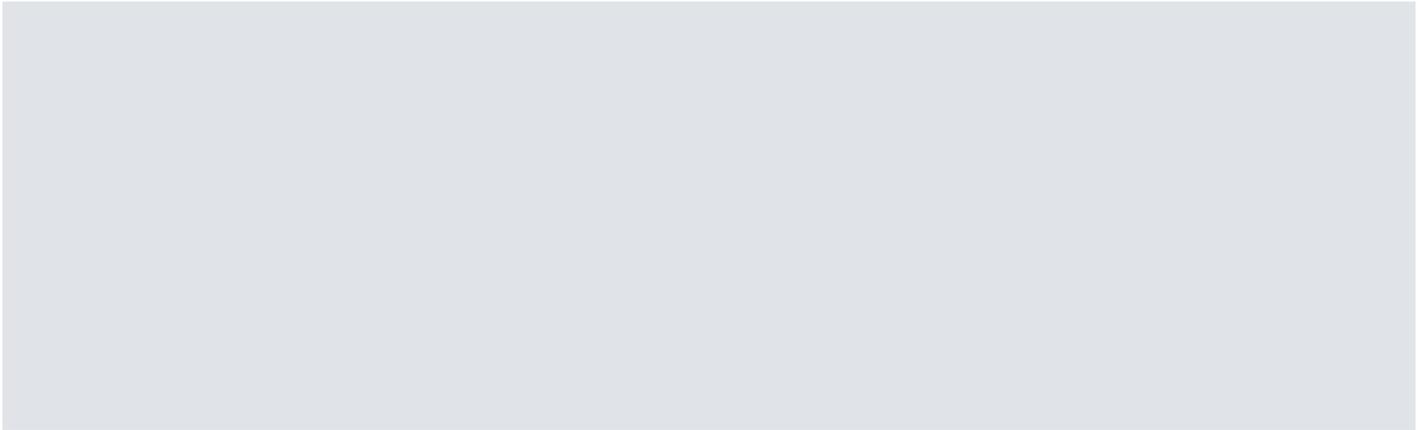
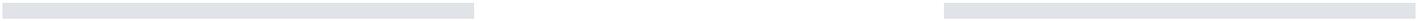
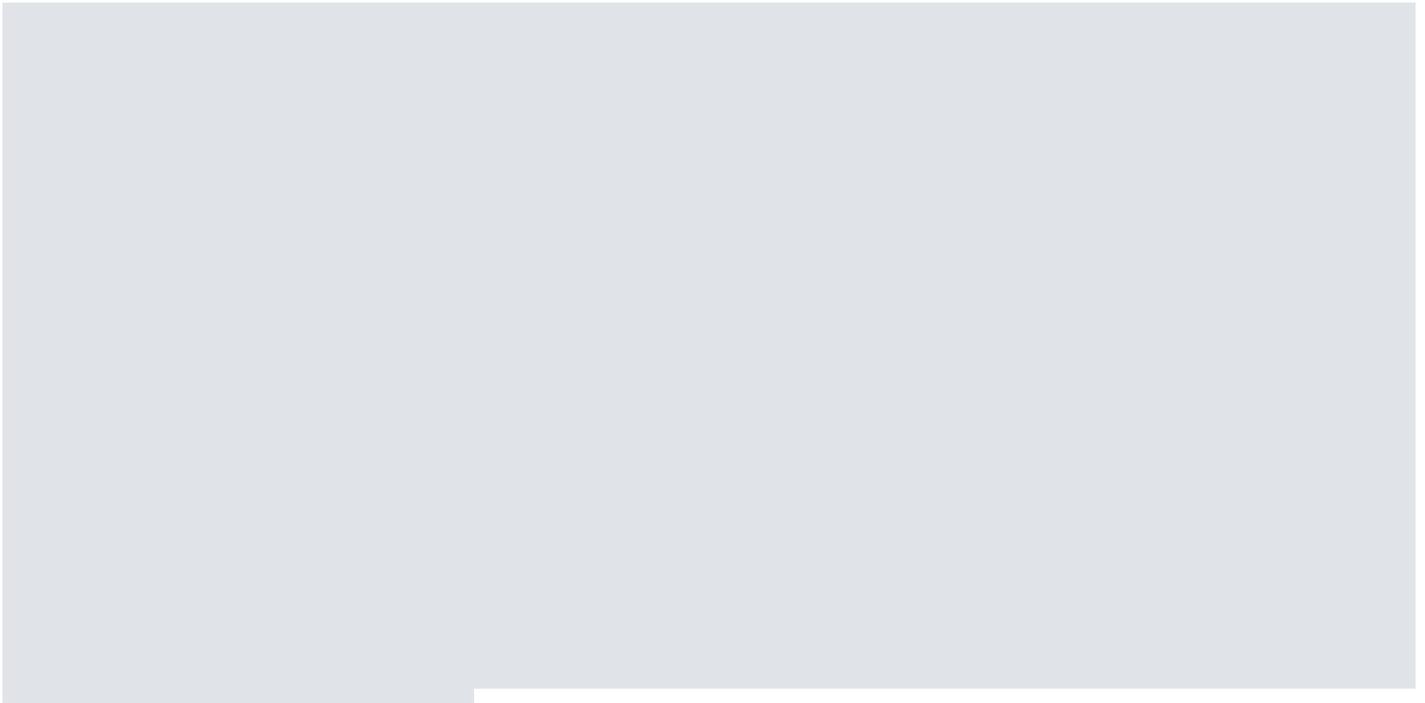
[Terms and Privacy Policy](#)

[Privacy Dashboard](#)

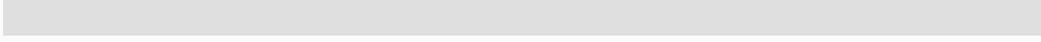
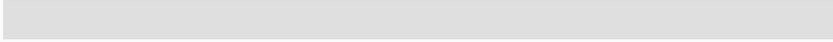
[About Our Ads](#)

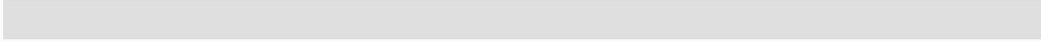
[Redacted]





 Recommended articles

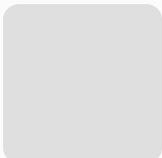
 


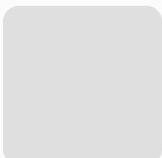
 


[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]



yahoo!news

[Yahoo!](#)

[US](#)

[Politics](#)

[2024 Election](#)

[World](#)

[Health](#)

[Science](#)

[The 360](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Originals](#)

[Terms and Privacy Policy](#)

[Privacy Dashboard](#)

[Help](#)

[About Our Ads](#)

[Share Your Feedback](#)

[Site Map](#)

[About Us](#)



© 2025 Yahoo. All rights reserved.