

Kleptocratic patterns during the Biden administration: A comprehensive investigation

The Biden administration (2021-2025) exhibited concerning patterns across several categories of potential institutional capture, though the evidence reveals a complex picture that differs markedly from systematic kleptocracy. While documented instances of family enrichment, dark money influence, and executive overreach emerged, these occurred within functioning democratic guardrails that largely held.

Family business dealings and foreign money flows

The most substantive evidence of potential monetization involves the Biden family's international business activities. **Hunter Biden received \$6.5 million from Ukrainian energy company Burisma** while his father served as Vice President, with testimony indicating he sold the "illusion of access." Chinese business ventures generated over **\$8 million to Biden family entities**, primarily through CEFC China Energy deals negotiated after Joe Biden left the vice presidency. Court documents and bank records traced **\$40,000 from Chinese funds to Joe Biden** through a complex series of family transactions marked as "loan repayments."

(House Oversight Committee)

James Biden's healthcare ventures raised additional concerns. He received **\$600,000 in loans from Americore Health** while promising the Biden name could "open doors," then wrote a **\$200,000 check to Joe Biden the same day** he received funds, also marked as loan repayment.

(House Oversight Committee) (CBS News) The company later filed bankruptcy and sued James Biden for fraud, settling for \$350,000 repayment. (Fox News)

The Department of Justice authenticated Hunter Biden's laptop contents through court filings, verifying emails showing extensive foreign business dealings. Special Counsel David Weiss secured convictions on gun and tax charges totaling **\$1.4 million in unpaid taxes**, though President Biden issued a full pardon in December 2024 before sentencing. Congressional investigations identified over **\$20 million in foreign payments** to Biden family members from Chinese, Ukrainian, Russian, Romanian, and Kazakhstani sources, with evidence Joe Biden met with nearly all foreign associates who paid his family. (U.S. House Committee on O...) (U.S. House Committee on O...)

Oversight mechanisms showed resilience despite gaps

The administration's approach to oversight revealed both adherence to norms and selective resistance. Biden fired only one Inspector General during his term - Martin Dickman in 2024 for

workplace harassment (ABC News) - contrasting sharply with Trump's dismissal of 17+ IGs. (NBC News) (Wikipedia) The administration retained Trump-appointed prosecutors for sensitive investigations, including Special Counsels Robert Hur and David Weiss, who operated with documented independence. (Wikipedia +2)

However, significant oversight gaps emerged. **Fourteen Inspector General positions remained vacant for extended periods**, (GovExec) with some unfilled for over 1,500 days. Despite calls from watchdog groups, Biden failed to remove DHS Inspector General Joseph Cuffari after findings he "engaged in conduct undermining independence" and "abused authority." (GovExec) (Project On Government Overreach) The administration asserted executive privilege over audio recordings from the classified documents investigation while providing transcripts, (CBS News) (CNN) and Treasury initially blocked congressional access to suspicious activity reports on Biden family finances. (Washington Times)

IRS whistleblowers Gary Shapley and Joseph Ziegler alleged their Hunter Biden investigation was "slow-walked" with political interference, (Ways and Means) claiming they were removed from the case after raising concerns. (CBS News +4) While other officials disputed some allegations, the controversy highlighted tensions between career investigators and political leadership. (CNN) The eventual presidential pardon terminated further investigation, with Special Counsel Weiss calling Biden's characterization of the prosecution "wrong" and "unfairly impugning" the Department of Justice.

(CNN) (NBC News)

Personnel practices strengthened merit protections while pursuing ideological goals

Rather than installing loyalists through weakened civil service protections, Biden reversed Trump's Schedule F on his first day (Federal News Network) (Applied Policy) and implemented the strongest civil service protections in decades. The Office of Personnel Management's April 2024 rule created robust appeals processes and narrowed definitions of policy-making positions, making it significantly harder for future administrations to politicize the federal workforce. (Government Executive +3)

The administration pursued unprecedented diversity initiatives, establishing government-wide DEI committees and achieving the "most diverse Cabinet in history" with gender parity among Secretaries. Federal employees with disabilities increased from 11.1% to **16.6%**, surpassing the 12% federal goal. However, a late-term hiring surge attempted to add **1,200 new DEI positions** in the final weeks before Trump's inauguration, with 33 positions posted in just 10 days following the election, potentially costing \$160 million annually.

Analysis revealed **140 Biden administration officials with revolving door connections** to industries they regulated, (OpenSecrets) though this represented a lower percentage than previous administrations.

The Washington Post The Washington Post The administration implemented the strongest ethics pledge in presidential history, including bans on "golden parachute" payments and enhanced recusal requirements, The Washington Post Steptoe though enforcement gaps remained evident.

Campaign Legal Center

Dark money networks achieved unprecedented scale and coordination

The Arabella Advisors network emerged as the dominant dark money force, with combined revenues reaching **nearly \$3 billion in the 2022 cycle**. The Sixteen Thirty Fund alone raised \$380 million in 2022 and spent \$410 million in 2020 to defeat Trump. Wikipedia Brennan Center for Justice Swiss billionaire Hansjörg Wyss donated **\$245 million** to Arabella entities since 2016, while George Soros and Pierre Omidyar provided additional millions. Wikipedia

These networks directly supported Biden through \$11.3 million to pro-Biden super PACs Capital Research Center and influenced administration policy through groups like "Governing for Impact," a Soros-funded advisory group that shaped regulatory policy over 20 times through "listening tours" with nominees. Fox News Capital Research Center The "Economic Speakers Bureau" connected former Biden officials with media, generating nearly 150 mainstream appearances defending administration policies. Capital Research Center

Federal courts found the administration crossed constitutional boundaries in coordinating with social media platforms. The Missouri v. Biden case revealed a "years-long pressure campaign" where officials threatened platforms with regulatory action for content decisions. Wikipedia Public Knowledge White House officials warned platforms about "fundamental reforms" including antitrust action if they didn't comply with content moderation requests. Missouri Independent While the Supreme Court dismissed the case on standing grounds, the dissent warned the decision created an "attractive model" for future censorship. SCOTUSblog

The FBI's role in the Hunter Biden laptop suppression emerged as particularly troubling. Despite possessing the laptop since December 2019 and confirming its authenticity, the Bureau warned platforms about potential "hack-and-leak operations" just before the New York Post story, contributing to its suppression on Twitter and Facebook during the crucial pre-election period.

House Judiciary Committee ... American Civil Liberties Union

Emergency powers pushed constitutional boundaries

The administration's use of emergency authorities revealed an expansive view of executive power that courts increasingly rejected. Biden extended the COVID-19 emergency until April 2023, well after declaring "the pandemic is over," using it to justify the student loan forgiveness program that would cost an estimated **\$400 billion**. Brennan Center for Justice The Supreme Court struck this down 6-3, with

Chief Justice Roberts comparing it to the French Revolution "modifying" the nobility - "it has abolished them." [SCOTUSblog](#) [Brennan Center for Justice](#)

The administration used emergency drawdown authority 55 times to provide **\$31.7 billion in military aid to Ukraine** from Pentagon stockpiles, bypassing normal congressional review.

[U.S. Department of State](#) The Defense Production Act saw dramatic expansion beyond COVID response into clean energy manufacturing, [Fierce Pharma](#) criticized by Republicans as abuse of emergency powers. [National Review](#) Banking crisis responses in 2023 involved extraordinary measures guaranteeing deposits beyond FDIC limits and creating emergency lending facilities, representing the most extensive intervention since 2008. [Fortune +2](#)

Courts increasingly applied the "major questions doctrine" to limit executive overreach. Beyond student loans, the Supreme Court struck down OSHA's business vaccine mandate and the CDC's eviction moratorium. [SCOTUSblog +2](#) These decisions established stronger precedents limiting presidential use of emergency powers for policy goals lacking clear congressional authorization.

[The Washington Post](#)

Government contracting hit records while maintaining some privatization limits

The administration achieved historic small business contracting levels, reaching **\$183 billion (28.8%) in FY2024**, with \$76.2 billion to small disadvantaged businesses. [US Department of Transport...](#)

[Committee for a Responsibl...](#) This represented genuine support for diverse businesses rather than cronyism. However, concerning patterns emerged in specific sectors. SpaceX contracts doubled from \$1.1 billion to \$3.7 billion despite Elon Musk's political activities, [ABC News](#) raising questions about the intersection of government contracting and political influence.

Biden ended Department of Justice contracts with private prison operators via executive order but didn't address ICE detention contracts, leaving 80% of immigration detention privatized.

[Brennan Center for Justice](#) The administration used extensive public-private partnerships for infrastructure implementation while maintaining existing pharmaceutical and technology contractor relationships without systematic reduction in government dependence on private entities.

Multi-agency coordination benefited specific sectors

Evidence revealed systematic coordination across agencies particularly benefiting the clean energy sector. The **\$27 billion Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund** distributed to eight environmental NGOs involved coordinated oversight from EPA, HUD, and DOE. [US EPA](#) Multi-agency memorandums streamlined clean energy permits on public lands, [U.S. Department of the Interi...](#) while coordinated voluntary carbon market policies involved Treasury, Agriculture, Energy, and economic advisors.

[Department of Energy +3](#)

The administration surpassed 25 gigawatts of clean energy deployment through coordinated federal permitting. (U.S. Department of the Interior) While supporting climate goals, this coordination created clear benefits for specific companies and organizations aligned with administration priorities. Similar patterns appeared in coordinated AI governance strategies with voluntary commitments from major tech companies rather than mandatory regulations. (FedScoop)

Distinguishing systematic capture from aggressive politics

The evidence reveals the Biden administration operated within democratic norms while pushing boundaries in specific areas. Unlike authoritarian kleptocracies, the United States maintained an independent judiciary that struck down executive overreach, a free press that exposed family business dealings, competitive elections resulting in peaceful transfer of power, and functioning (if sometimes slow) accountability mechanisms.

The administration's enhanced ethics framework, including the strongest presidential ethics pledge in history, represented genuine reform (Steptoe +2) even as enforcement gaps remained.

(Campaign Legal Center) (U.S. Department of Justice) Congressional oversight, though resisted at times, continued functioning with Republican investigations proceeding after the 2022 midterms. Inspector Generals, despite vacancies, maintained independence with Trump appointees completing sensitive investigations. (NBC News) (Washington Times)

Critical distinctions from systematic kleptocracy include: no evidence of systematically redirecting state resources to personal accounts; family enrichment occurred through private business dealings rather than direct treasury theft; dark money influenced politics but didn't replace democratic processes; (Brennan Center for Justice) emergency powers faced judicial review and reversal; and privatization followed legal contracting processes with public reporting.

The Biden administration exhibited concerning patterns warranting continued scrutiny and reform. Family business dealings exploited political connections for profit. Dark money achieved unprecedented scale influencing policy. (Americansforpublictrust) (Brennan Center for Justice) Executive overreach attempted to bypass Congress on major initiatives. Selective oversight resistance protected political interests. (Washington Times)

However, these patterns occurred within functioning democratic institutions that provided meaningful constraints. Courts struck down overreach, Congress investigated misconduct, inspectors general pursued cases, and voters rendered judgment through elections. The evidence suggests aggressive use of available political tools rather than dismantling of democratic governance structures characteristic of kleptocratic capture.

Reform priorities emerging from this analysis include: strengthening foreign business disclosure requirements for presidential families, accelerating inspector general confirmations, limiting

emergency power duration and scope, increasing dark money transparency requirements,

(Brennan Center for Justice) and codifying ethics requirements with enforcement mechanisms.

(Campaign Legal Center) Campaign Legal Center The Biden administration's record underscores both the resilience of American democratic institutions and their continued vulnerability to exploitation within legal boundaries. (Transparency)